Series: Giving It Up

Message: “Giving Up Popularity”

Text: Matthew 21:1-11

Theme: Lenten Sermon Series

Date: March 24, 2013

Location: Christ Community EFC

As you can tell by the decorations and the banners this is Palm Sunday. I would like to thank Mickie McWilliams and Gini Browns for their faithfully service to our church in keeping the sanctuary so beautiful.

This is Palm Sunday but this is also the 6th and last Sunday of Lent and today’s message is the 6th sermon in our Lenten series on Giving It Up.

The season of Lent began on Ash Wednesday and ends this week on Maundy Thursday. Not counting the Sundays there are 40 days of Lent.

I mentioned at the beginning of this series that the 40 day of Lent serve to remind us of the 40 days that Christ spent fasting and praying in the wilderness in preparation for His public ministry.

So Lent is the season for the church to prepare our hearts for the celebration of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ at Easter.

Traditionally Lent is marked by penitence. Penitence in the truest since has to do with remorse or the sorrow we feel for the sins we have committed.

And Lent is a time to prepare our hearts to celebrate Christ and the new life He gives us through the cross and the Easter Resurrection.

To help in this idea of turning from the old life of sin and turning to the new life we have in Christ many people will fast from something during the 40 days of Lent.

But as we have said Lent is for life, not just chocolate.

So over the last few weeks we have been looking at what should we give up…not just for Lent but for life.

You see it is one thing to give up chocolate, or soda, or TV for a couple weeks. But we want to be truly transformed, changed by the presence of Christ in our lives.

So we have asked, what does God want us to give up so we can live as fully committed followers of Christ and grow in our deepening relationship with God?

What are the things in our lives that we must really let go of because they are holding us back in our spiritual life.

So far we have talked about giving up things like control, and expectations, feelings of superiority and our enemies.

These are kind of things that make since. These are things that hold us back in some kind of obvious way.

Last week we talked about the need to give up our lives as well. And this seems a little less obvious than the previous things we talked about.

When it all comes down to it, what do we really have apart from our lives? I mean, if we give up our lives, that’s kind of it, isn’t it?

But we read in the Bible that our lives are not our own.

Untimely we are all slaves of something. We can either be slaves of sin or we can be slaves of Christ.

When we insist on holding on to our lives and deciding that we want to control that world around us and when we refuse to submit to Christ we are separating ourselves from God and are owned by sin.

But when we give up our lives, when we discover that true life is found only in Jesus Christ and in dying to Christ as Paul puts it is then that we truly begin to live this kind of life that God has for us.

When we die in Christ we are raised in Christ. We have new life. A life that is not our own but a life that is more full and abundant than anything we could have ever imagined apart from Christ.

But this only happens when we give up our lives. Jesus tells us that those who choose to save their lives will lose them and those who lose their lives for His sake will find them.

This week we are going to look at another one of those things that we need to give up but it might not make a whole lot of since at first.

Today we are talking about the idea of giving up popularity.

And that does sound a little bit strange doesn’t it. I mean after all when we are popular we have more of a voice and people like us and people respect us and they will listen to us when we speak.

So why do we need to give up being popular?

**If you would, go ahead and open your Bibles to Matthew 21.**

Let me ask again, why do we need to give up popularity?

As Matthew 21 opens we see that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem.

This morning, on Palm Sunday the day we remember Jesus’ triumphant enter into Jerusalem we learn something very important from this passage.

We learn that popularity is not always what it is cracked up to be.

In many Bibles you will find a title for this section of Scriptures. It is called: “Jesus Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem.”

The word “triumphant” implies a victory, a conquering of sorts. And that is certainly what Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is.

A victory of cosmic portions!

This is one of those events in the life and ministry of Jesus that is actually recoded in all four of the gospels. It is here in Matthew 21, in Mark 11, Luke 19 starting in verse 28, and in John 12:12-14.

Matthew 21:1-11 (NIV) 1

**As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.**

**3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."**

It might seem kind of a strange choice to send for a donkey. After all, donkeys are known to kind of stubborn.

And we are told elsewhere that this particular donkey is one that no one had ever ridden before which makes it an even more unusual choice.

You can find a lot on the internet. With a quick Google search you can discover say…what are characteristics of a donkey.

Did you know that donkeys have a very high sense of self-preservation?

They are not prone to allow people they don’t know or people that they don’t trust lead them someplace that they may be unfamiliar with.

This may be why donkeys seem so stubborn in the first place.

But Jesus tells his disciples to go get this donkey that doesn’t have any clue who they are, this donkey that nobody has ever ridden on before and bring it back so he can ride it into town.

And though it may be a strange choice it is an appropriate choice.

Because as Matthew goes on to point out in verse 4 as he quotes from Zechariah 9:9:

**4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 5 "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"**

Jesus knew and understood His role as the messiah. He knew that His time was drawing near and that it was time for Him to reveal Himself publically to the people.

So He gets this donkey and he hops on it and starts riding it towards Jerusalem.

**6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.**

Jesus doesn’t enter the city on a giant war horse ready for battle. He enters humbly as the messiah he was, not the messiah that the people wanted and expected to be.

**8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.**

When the crowd spread their cloaks on the road before Jesus it was a symbol of their submission to Jesus as king.

We find an example of this in 2 Kings 9:13 when Jehu, a little know king in the northern kingdom of Israel returns victorious from a battle his men lay their cloaks before him. It is a sign of submission.

Others were spreading out branches or palms before Jesus. This is where we get the name Palm Sunday from. The branches were palm branches. The palm branch symbolized Jewish nationalism.

Let’s try to get a better understanding what’s going on here in this passage and how it can come to life in our lives.

To put this into our context this would be like, oh I don’t know; say the Buckeyes beat Iowa State.

Or better yet say they go all the way and take the NCAA Tournament this year!

Can you imagine what it would be like, as the team bus rolls onto campus?

The roads would be lined with fans dressed in Ohio colors waving giant “O” and throwing buckeye leaves on the road in front of the bus.

That’s popularity…especially if you are the star player who won the game. But popularity is fleeting.

What if, hypothetically, next year, they don’t do so well? And somehow they get bumped out of the play offs…they are out because they lost to…Michigan.

What if it is that same player who was the star player this year is the one who loses the game for the Buckeyes next year?

How would the fans treat him then? Get the picture here?

But today, this first Palm Sunday the crowd was stirred up…we’re going to the play offs!

The crowd was looking to Jesus to be king of their nation. But Jesus wants to be king of our hearts!

**9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"**

**"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"**

**10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee**."

Hosanna means literal save or save us. This is a cry for Jesus to take His royal throne.

Everything that we see going on here from the crowd signifies the royalty of Christ.

Hosanna! Jesus save us from these Roman gentile dogs who have taken over our country and have enslaved us with their laws, taxes and armies.

People are fired up. They are excited! Jesus is at the height of his popularity. But it doesn’t last long does it?

What a welcome Jesus got as he entered Jerusalem. “Hosanna!” the people cried, hailing him as an honored king.

The beginning of the week is filled all shorts of shouts and accolades or praises and songs of joy.

The crowds loved Jesus on Palm Sunday and are praising him as their long awaited messiah.

Centuries of expectations are literally being fulfilled right before their eyes.

But is amazing how quickly things can turn.

By the end of the week; these same people who are shouting hosanna will be crying out crucify Him.

All the popularity that Jesus has at the beginning of the week will be replaces with cries for his death and the release of a convicted murderer by the end of the week.

And this is the danger we face when it comes to popularity.

Popularity doesn’t stay with you. You may be the hottest thing on the market one day and the next day nobody knows who you are. Remember pet rocks or cabbage-patch dolls?

Think of today’s technology. Something that came out five years ago, in some cases 5 weeks or even 5 days ago, something that was the biggest rage is suddenly replaced.

Apple puts out a new iPad or iPhone every year or so and it just keeps replacing the previous one making it obsolete.

And it is true in all fascist of life. In the music industry there are very few music artists that have the kind of staying power need to last for a long time. Except maybe George Beverly Shea!

In movies, very few actors stay popular for the long haul. The faces change quickly on the cover the popular magazines.

What about those cool people, those popular people back when you were in high school? Are they still a big deal in the world today?

Popularity is fleeting and yet we seek it.

We all seek popularity. Everyone deep down desires to be liked—accepted, to be noticed. We want to be recognized. The question is…recognized by whom?

People will do all kinds of things to get their 15 minutes of fame. And it seems today that the more bizarre or outrageous it is the more “hits” your YouTube video will get on-line.

But popularity, acclaim, and fame just don’t stay. The crowds move on to the next latest and greatest thing that comes along.

Popularity and acclaim in the eyes of others is fleeting, and if we put all our faith in it we will be very disappointed.

If we put all of our efforts and all of our faith into achieving a name for ourselves, we may accomplish it for a little while.

But it doesn’t last.

So instead of seeking our own fame and or own popularity what should we be seeking after? Is there a better path for us to follow?

Is there something out there that will last?

I heard a story this week that makes the point for me.

There was this guy named Jim and Jim had recently given his life to the Lord. And he was very excited about his new faith.

Then Jim went to church on Sunday morning and he looked around and he notice that some of the people looked…well bored.

They looked disinterested. He saw a lot of people who were just going through the motions, people who had lost that excitement and joy in their faith.

And Jim knew that he was going to need somebody as a mentor if he was going to keep growing in his faith.

But as he looked around he didn’t see a lot of options.

Then he noticed Bill. Now Bill was in his early 80’s and had been a Christian for decades.

But when Jim looked at Bill during the worship service he noticed that Bill still had a little bit of a fire in his eyes. He still had an excitement about his faith that was absent from a lot of people.

So after the service Jim went over to Bill and asked him, “How do you do it? How do you keep that fire and excitement in your faith?”

I see a lot of people who just seem to be going through the motions, how are you different? What is it about you that you do differently?

So Bill invited Jim to his home that evening so they could visit.

That evening Jim shows up at Bills house and Bill is sitting out on his porch with his old coon hound Blue just laying on the porch next to him.

Jim has a seat and asks the question once again. “Bill, how do you keep your faith burning and growing?”

Bill says “Well it’s a lot like my old dog blue. Last week we were just sitting here drinking some lemon aid, enjoying the evening. And a rabbit jumped out from under that bush.

Well Blue was just laying there like he is right now but when he saw that rabbit and he jumped off that porch like his tail was on fire.

And he started barking and howling and chasing that rabbit all over the place.

Then all the other dogs in the neighborhood got caught up in the excitement. And they were barking and running around as well.

But before long they kind of started to wonder off. They got bored and went back to their houses, to their porches.

But old Blue was still running around howling and barking and chasing all around. But eventually it got dark and Blue came back to the porch and he was the only dog left.

Bill said “Jim do you know why Blue did that?”

Jim thought for a while and then said “I guess it was because of his breading and his training.

And Bill shook his head and said “No.” No that’s not quite what it was. You see Blue never took his eyes off that rabbit.

As long as he kept watching that rabbit, as long as he could see and follow that rabbit Blue was going crazy trying to chase that dang thing down.

Our faith is a lot like that. Isn’t it?

As long as we keep our eyes on Jesus we can run around all day long.

But once we start looking at other things it doesn’t take long for us to give up the chase.

Once we start going after things like popularity and acclaim and making a name for ourselves, we lose track of God.

And we do so pretty quickly and our faith becomes irrelevant and we start going through the motions.

God doesn’t call us to be famous. God doesn’t call us to be well loved by everyone. God doesn’t call us to seek the temporary thrills of this world.

But God does call us to put our faith in something that will last forever.

God calls us to put our faith in God’s unending love and grace—something that will never go away, and will sustain us through the most difficult of times, even when our popularity may be fading and the people around us are shouting against us.

God’s love and grace are a very present reality.

So this Lent let me encourage you to give up another thing. Give up on popularity. Give up on the idea that people need to know who you are.

Give up in the idea that you have to submit to what the world considers important in order to be accepted and liked.

Instead put your faith in a loving God who loves you regardless of what the world thinks about you.

Popularity is fleeting. It does not stay around very long. So why spend so much time cultivating something that won’t last?

Give up popularity. Keep your eyes on that which is far, far more important—Jesus Christ.