

Text: John 12:19. Mid week Lent. **February 26, 2015.**

Service intro on irony: The oracle at Delphi was supposed to be a way to tell the future. You went to the oracle and asked a question. You usually got a cryptic answer that could have several meanings. One time, a king went to the oracle before a major battle. He asked the oracle, "Who will win the battle?" The oracle answered, "A great king will be victorious." The king strutted off, confident of victory. But he lost. It was the other great king who was victorious. Kind of ironic, isn't it? For our midweek Lenten services this year, we will be looking at ironic statements of Jesus' enemies. They said things about Jesus with disgust or disdain that we can see as words of praise for our refrains. Tonight we'll look at one of those statements, "The world has gone after him."

**So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see? You are accomplishing nothing. Look! The world has gone after him." John 12:19**

It happens all the time, someone with power and influence gets pushed aside by the new kid on the block. The new kids on the block probably pushed aside some other boy band, that's not the point. The scene plays out in movies. There's a cool clique in high school. Then a new kid shows up. Wins the quarterback job. And now he's the cool kid. And the former cool kids aren't so happy anymore.

The Pharisees were the cool kids. They were extremely religious, at a time when it was cool to be religious. The more religious you looked, the better. The Pharisees ruled the religious high school. They had the affection of the people. People said, "Look how awesome they are, praying on the street corners, fasting twice a week, giving a tenth of all they get." That made the Pharisees feel entitled. They felt entitled to the people's affection. They felt entitled to the control and influence they exercised over the common people.

Then along came Jesus. Jesus didn't give the Pharisees his affections. He told them what a bunch of hypocrites they were. So the common people no longer followed the Pharisees. The people started following Jesus. Jesus! The guy who hung around with prostitutes and the horrible tax collectors. Jesus! The guy who ate with sinners! Jesus? People are going after him? That's like the scumbags or dirtballs, or whatever you called them in high school, suddenly being the cool, popular kids. What on earth is going on? Look! The world has gone after him! O the irony in their statement. The world has gone after him.

You see, the Pharisees were on a mission, not a mission from God, but a mission to oppose God. Their mission was to stop Jesus, drag him down, pull his name through the mud. They tried tricks and traps. Should we stone this woman caught in adultery? They tried politics. Should we pay taxes to Caesar? Nothing worked. They accomplished nothing. In fact, every trick was turned around on them. Every trap Jesus found a third option. Every time they confronted Jesus, Jesus got more popular and they got less popular. It seemed the whole world has gone after Jesus.

Do you see that it's pointless to oppose Jesus? There is nothing to be gained by opposing Christ. Nothing. When your mission is contrary to Jesus' mission, Jesus' mission will always win. Jesus wanted the whole world to go after him. Jesus wanted every person to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Jesus had to be jumping up and down for joy to hear the Pharisees say, "The world has gone after him." That's exactly what Jesus wanted, but they said it with such disdain and anger. The world has gone after him. That's exactly what we would want, right? Let's come back to that question.

First, let's look a little more at who composed this world that was going after Jesus. It was the crowd, an unnamed mass, a mob, a group of unrelated and disconnected people. Certainly not those with religious titles like priest and definitely not people worthy of the title Pharisee. Why were these people, this crowd, going after Jesus? He had raised a man named Lazarus from the dead! From the dead! Lazarus had been dead four days, well beyond a logical explanation like a swoon. Jesus raised a dead man. The Pharisees had no trap or trick for that. The people who were with Jesus when he raised Lazarus spread the word. Wouldn't you? And they kept on spreading the word. And they made Jesus so popular, that it does not seem like an exaggeration when the Pharisees said, "the world has gone after him."

But there's another bit of irony. Devotion based on popularity fades quickly. Just as the people cast the Pharisees aside when Jesus raised the dead, the people cast Jesus aside when he was no longer the cool kid in high school. When Jesus was on trial, these same people, these same crowds, yelled, "Crucify him!" Do you know how long that took? Five days. That's a more rapid fall than high school. Five days. It was the Sunday we call Palm Sunday when the Pharisees said, "The world has gone after him." It was Friday morning when the crowds yelled, "Crucify him!" There's a whole lot of irony going on.

Doesn't that mirror the irony in our own lives? Thursday night we are praising Jesus! Friday morning we will be yelling at our coworkers, harboring hatred for the boss. That only takes one day. Do we only go after Jesus when it's popular? "Jesus, man, I love you and you're great and all, but some of the stuff your Bible says about men and women is from the stone age. No one goes for that anymore. Jesus, your views on marriage are so outdated, even that you talk about marriage. Marriage is dying faster than the phonebook. Come on, Jesus, no one will go after you like that."

Or maybe, there's a Pharisee alive in you, a Pharisee who secretly isn't that happy that so many new people are getting so much attention. Things used to be how I liked them. Now there's new people and new ideas and I just don't seem to matter anymore. Maybe secretly we would be happy to have our nice, little church, stay our nice little church. Have the whole world go after Jesus? "Maybe not," says my sinful self.

But God so loved the world. God loved the world. God loved the world of sinners like you and me with our Pharisee thoughts and our crucify shouts. Jesus bled and suffered and died and rose to win the world. To win you! Jesus always wanted the world to go after him, so much he took away the sins of the world, so much he gave you the holiness you needed to see the Lord. Jesus has always wanted the whole world to go after him, all the way to heaven.

Not sure? Jesus pulled you out of the sinful world and baptized you. Jesus said, "You are mine!" Jesus called you out of the sinful world and brought you to faith in him. Jesus called you to follow after him. The same word the Pharisees used with disgust, "after him," is the same word Jesus used with joy, "Come, follow after me." Follow after Jesus all the way to heaven. Follow after Jesus every day of this life. O that the words of the Pharisees would be true, that the whole world has gone after Jesus. O for the day when we can rejoice and say, "The whole world has gone after Jesus!" Amen.