



“Pass it On: A Whole Different Kind of Kingdom”

Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching

Isaiah 9: 1-7; Matthew 16: 21-23; Mark 11: 1-10

April 14, 2019 – Palm Sunday

I want to try to paint a picture for you that some of us experienced last weekend. As many of you are aware, we hosted a group of 3rd-8th graders, last Saturday, as the Children’s Christian Theater presented a musical here at North Shore. I wish I had the cast and the musicians to actually lay out this scene for you this morning, but it started with the music setting this very majestic and driving tone as the narrator began talking about the day that Jesus entered into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. The crowds begin to swell with anticipation as cheerleaders come running onto the stage waving pom-poms and leading cheers for the entrance of Jesus. As Jesus enters the stage the music builds, the crowd grows more and more excited, and suddenly a new narrator jumps to the middle off the stage and yells, “We all know what happens next!” From one narrator to the next the excitement grows as they go on, line by line, with their expectation of what is coming...

- ‘Jesus assembles a huge army!’
- ‘And they march through and take over the city!’
- ‘And Jesus reigns as the king of Israel forever and ever!’

The music is racing, the crowds are cheering, the energy is soaring, and Jesus raises his hand to quiet the scene, and says with somber gentleness, “That’s not what happens next!”

I wish I could have had that whole group here this morning to enact the scene, because words don’t describe the emotion of that moment. With two kids in the cast, I saw four performances of the show – and this part got to me every time. Even as I put these words on paper for this sermon I got chills remembering that scene. I can so vividly picture the boys standing on a crate in the middle of the stage shouting of the majesty and might of this rising king of the Jews, and that scene has really caused me to reflect, this year, on how many of the people, on the side of the road that day, had any clue of the nature of the kingdom that Jesus was about to usher in!

I wanted us to read that passage from Isaiah today, because it is one we so often read and hear at Christmas. I think it serves as a fascinating frame, however, for this triumphal entry into Jerusalem. You see, our lenses for these prophecies of the Messiah are tremendously colored by our Christian perspective. We read these words from Isaiah 9, and others from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and so forth – and we imbue Jesus into that framework. Through our Christian lenses,

those words describe Jesus, and the New Testament is unambiguous in its effort to connect the life and ministry of Jesus to those Old Testament promises. For the Christian world, there is a clear connection between the promised messiah and the person of Jesus. For the pre-Christian Jewish world, however, the messiah they anticipated was nothing like that which unfolded in Jesus. They expected a king! They expected a ruler. They expected the divinely anointed monarch who would restore the glory of Israel – and that's not Jesus.

The people of Isaiah's time were under tremendous threat and persecution. From the rise of the Assyrian Empire that is taking over the region and threatening their livelihood in the early years covered in Isaiah's prophecies, to the Babylonian captivity and exile that marked the later years, the people of Isaiah had lost their sense of identity as the blessed people of God. They were constantly under threat, persecuted, held in captivity or exiled from their homeland, and they expected a warrior king – as brave as David taking on Goliath – who would restore Israel to its rightful place and peace. And, when you fast forward 600 years, the circumstance is very similar. By the time of Jesus, it's Rome that is ruling the region through those most certainly not of the lineage of David, but the circumstance is much the same as they are still controlled by the rule and subjugation of Godless kingdom. Both at the time of Isaiah, and that of Jesus, the people were clamoring for their perfect David who would restore the glory of Israel.

At least for some, that's what they were cheering that day in Jerusalem. At least for some, they still didn't have a sense of the kingdom that God was ushering in through this Jesus of Nazareth. At least for some, they were rejoicing in the rising of a new God-given monarch for Israel. We shared that passage of Jesus telling his disciples about his pending death and resurrection because we have to understand in all of this, that even those closest to Jesus could not comprehend what was happening here.

At least for some, and perhaps for many, on the road that day –

- The cheers were for the Messiah King that had finally come.
- The cheers were for the one who would restore Israel.
- The cheers were for the one who would have the wisdom of Solomon and the courage of David, and who would amass that army, march through the streets, claim the kingdom, protect the people, and reign triumphantly over the everlasting peace and glory of Israel.

That's the kingdom they thought was coming, but that's not the kingdom God had in mind! Just consider the differences...

- Kings have subjects – Jesus had disciples.
- Kings have armies – Jesus had the Spirit of God.
- Kings battle and war – Jesus taught his followers to lay down their swords and turn the other cheek.
- Kings have thrones – Jesus had a cross.
- Kings have castles – Jesus had a tomb.

For more than half a millennium the people of God had awaited the arrival of their Messiah King – and for at least some on the road that day, they thought that, in Jesus of Nazareth, the day had finally come in which the one who would have the wisdom of Solomon and the courage of David would amass that army, march through the streets, claim the kingdom, protect the people, and

reign triumphantly over the everlasting peace and glory of Israel. But, as we know so well, that's not what happened next. That's not the kingdom God had in mind!

There's a scene amidst the crucifixion of Jesus in which he is on the cross, nearing his moment of death, and those who were crucifying him put a sign above his head that named the charge against him, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." It was their way of mocking him. It was their way of highlighting the absurdity of the claims. They put those words up there because, if this were God's promised leader, if this were God's anointed Messiah, if this were the long-awaited king of the Jews that would reign forever, then he wouldn't be up there. They put those words up there because, so absurd were those claims that he was the Messiah, because the Messiah King would never be crucified on a cross. What they entirely missed, however, was how insightful those words truly were – because, indeed, that was the kingdom God had in mind.

- Jesus didn't come to create castles and kingdoms over which he would command his rule – he came to reign in the lives of each and every person that would call upon his name!
- Jesus didn't come to battle for territory and war over power – he came to instill the surpassing peace of God in the hearts of a disrupted and broken humanity.
- Jesus didn't come to create subjects over whom he would wield his authority – Jesus came to find disciples who would abide in him, trust in him, follow him, and discover the glory of God's abundant love shone through him.

For at least some of the people on the road that day, there was an image, a hope, an expectation that Jesus was the one who was going to create the long-awaited reign of the anointed Messiah King who would rule with peace over the earthly kingdom of Israel. And, for those who longed for that day, they discovered that God had an entirely different kind of kingdom in mind. But, we stand here 2,000 years later, remembering those who cheered that day, and we do know what happened next!

There were no swords. There were no armies marching on the streets. There was no restoration of the kingdom of Israel. There was no kingdom in the way so many expected. But, there was a king.

- There was a king of mercy, of grace, of love, and of peace.
- There was a king who was willing to empty himself of divine glory for the sake of bearing the sins of humanity.
- There was a king who was willing to humble himself to the point of death so that those of his kingdom could know life.
- There was king who didn't seek to live forever to reign over the people, but one who was willing to die so that the people could live forever in his reign!

The people that day lined the streets and shouted his praises, in at least some cases, because they thought they had found the one who would restore Israel to its glory on earth. Little did they know that what they had actually found was the one who would restore humanity to eternal glory in the reign of God. That's the kingdom God had in mind. That's the kingdom to which Jesus opened the gates. And, that's the king we praise as we lift our voices in rejoicing the one who died that we might live in that heavenly kingdom today, tomorrow and always!

“Open to me the gates of righteousness,” the Psalmist writes. “This is the gate of the Lord... This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it... Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord... O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” That is the kingdom God had in mind. Thanks be to God, and amen!