

"Blessed is THIS King"

Luke 19:37-38

March 28, 2010

Palm Sunday

A father once brought his young daughter into a toy store to buy her a doll. As soon as they came inside the store, the girl picked out the doll that she wanted. "This is the one I want," she said, holding it tightly in her arms. It wasn't nearly as nice as the one her father had meant to get for her, but because her mind was made up, he bought it for her. The cheap little doll was soon left in a corner. One day, the father told his daughter that he had wanted to buy her a much bigger and prettier doll than she had picked out. "Why didn't you?" she asked. "Because you wouldn't let me," he told her. "Remember?"

This is a sad, yet not unbelievable story. The poor little girl made two mistakes. First, she wanted something that was appealing to her, but far less valuable than what her father wanted to give her. Secondly, she was so eager to get what she wanted that she just couldn't wait for the better gift which her father had in store for her.

This is like what happened on that day two thousand years ago which we now call Palm Sunday. Like the little girl who wanted a doll, the people of Israel wanted a king. They wanted the kind of king that appealed to them – a king who would restore Israel's military might and political prestige. They wanted a lot of short term benefits from this king – freedom from Roman rule, economic prosperity, and so on.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, His processional increased in size and strength. People laid their coats down on the road for Jesus to ride over. People cut off palm branches and waved them in a frenzy. The people shouted out in excitement and anticipation, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" They were ecstatic. "Blessed is THIS king", they thought. "He can bring us the power, the prestige, and prosperity which we desire!"

Like the girl in the story, the people were blinded by baubles which were, in the grand scheme of things, cheap and trivial. Military might and political power don't last very long. One kingdom replaces another on the world scene and this is replaced by another. Prosperity makes our lives comfortable but cannot prevent our lives from ending. Death always comes calling and no earthly king can prevent it.

Like the father in the story, their Heavenly Father had something far better in store for His people than simply a bigger and better earthly kingdom. He had sent His Son, Jesus Christ, not to establish the kingdom of Israel, but the kingdom of God. However, the people were so enthralled with the cheap imitation that they wouldn't see and couldn't wait for their Father to give them the genuine kingdom of God. Like a doll tossed in a corner when the excitement wears off and it is no longer any fun, Jesus was discarded by His people when the thrill of the Palm Sunday parade was over and He couldn't provide the "fun" they craved. Only instead of ending up in a corner, He was nailed to a cross.

The Jews were left out of the kingdom of God because they would not believe it when Jesus spoke about it and would not wait for it when Jesus promised to deliver it. They wanted what they wanted right away. Not only did they end up outside of the kingdom of God, but the kingdom of Israel ended up in ruins at the hands of the Romans 35 years later.

Are we any different than the Jews of the 1st century? Don't we want something appealing and immediately gratifying from our God? We look to God for financial and material gain; success in our family, our career, and community; peace and contentment. There are many preachers on TV and churches in our land who will promise you just that. In fact, a sign outside of a local church proclaimed their motto: "Helping you succeed in life!"

When we hear about all of these wonderful things, we want them right now! We don't live in a very patient society. One of the biggest reasons proposed for passing the recent health care reform was because we have to do something NOW! We want everything NOW! We want telephones that are with us and can reach us NOW, not phones attached to walls which we have to seek out; instant messages, not written letters; Twitter feeds, not in-depth stories; microwave cooking, not conventional ovens. Our need for super fast instant gratification is summed up by the man who said, while waiting for his coffee to reheat in a microwave oven, "Hurry up! I don't have all minute!"

God our Father has something magnificent in store for His people. Yet it seems as if we don't have time to wait for it. In fact, like the girl in the story, we don't want to wait for it. We want what we want now. Often, if we even mention the heavenly kingdom which God has prepared, people - non-Christians and even Christians - will criticize us for "not living in the real world" or "being too heavenly minded to be any earthly good."

We have to be very careful here and learn from the mistakes of the people of the Palm Sunday parade. By so fervently pursuing the “here and now” and expecting instant gratification from God, we may cause ourselves to miss out on the better “there and then” and the far greater gratification which our Father has in store for us.

So don't be fooled by the brand of “feel good” Christianity which promises all sorts of good things immediately in this life. There's the danger embodied in the saying, “Be careful what you ask for. You may just get it.” You may get some of the things of this life which you so desperately want and become bored like the little girl in the story because these things are not as satisfying as you thought they would be.

Or, you may not get the things you seek after and, like some of the participants in that Palm Sunday parade, become disillusioned with God for not being the kind of King you hoped he would be. You might even feel guilty. Many Christians today are promised that they can have the desires of this heart if they just have enough faith. If you don't get what you desire, you may feel guilty because God is punishing you for some unspecified sin or because you didn't have enough faith. Either way, you'll be disappointed.

Remember that, like the father in the story, your Heavenly Father has something better in store for you. See the Palm Sunday procession for what it actually is and not what you might hope it to be. Jesus was not riding into Jerusalem to establish the kingdom of Israel or any other powerful earthly kingdom. He was riding into Jerusalem to establish the kingdom of God. Jesus would do this, not by power and might, but by humility and service; not by living gloriously, but by suffering miserably; not by killing those who opposed Him to punish them, but by dying for them in order to forgive them.

By dying on the cross five days later, Jesus successfully brought to completion His mission and established His kingdom. When the angels sang at Jesus' birth, they proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” (Luke 2:14) And now, as He goes to die, the people, perhaps unwittingly, proclaim, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Earth and heaven are joined together in peace at the birth and life of Jesus. And the glory which the angels asked for at His birth is now realized in His death for the sin of the entire world.

Don't be in a hurry to be immediately satisfied by grabbing and accumulating the things of this world. Through Jesus' death on the cross, you have the most important possession there is: forgiveness of all of your sins and peace with God. Through Jesus' resurrection from the dead, you

have the most complete satisfaction – a place in the kingdom of God which has been established in your hearts through Holy Baptism.

Therefore wait patiently for that which the Father has in store for you. This is not easy. The way of the kingdom of God is the way of the cross, not of pleasure; the way of humility, not success; and the way of suffering, not of satisfaction. But it is the way to something so wonderful, so powerful, and so eternal that you cannot even conceive of it now. As the Scriptures proclaim, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

The well-known hymn for Palm Sunday sums up the mood and meaning of the day well.

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, Thy pow'r and reign.*

Blessed be THIS King. He brings us, not what we think we want, but what we truly need. He gives us, not what satisfies us temporarily, but what satisfies us for all eternity. Blessed be THIS king! Hosanna in the highest! Amen.