

Going Through the Gate

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 Mark 11:1-11

Awhile back, I saw some flash cards that had cartoons on them designed to help you learn the books of the Bible. One of the cards had a big cartoon letter “S” on it, and the “S” had arms and was stirring a bowl. Which book was this one for? Esther. Another had a picture of a king on the front of a newspaper, the Daily Chronicle. This would help you remember the book of 1 Chronicles, and for 2 Chronicles there were two pictures. I didn’t buy the cards, but now I wish I had.

Images and pictures are powerful for us. I’m going to say three different phrases, and you see what image you get in your mind. Ready? “Open the door. Open up in there”...“Open the door and LET ME IN! (stomping feet on “let me in)...“Open the door and let me in! Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin”.

Did you get different images each time? That first one, with “open up in there,” I pictured a police officer knocking on the door of a crook’s hideout. The second one, with the foot stomping? Maybe a little kid throwing a tantrum because their big brother or big sister has locked them out of their room. And that last one, of course, had me picturing the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf.

Did anybody think of a king? Because that’s what our Psalm reading is about. It’s about a king returning from battle saying, “Open the gates of the temple!” Then there is praise and celebration and blessing all around. The king thanks God for victory, the people praise God for the kindness they’ve been shown, and the priests offer prayers and sacrifices. “Open the gates” – a king’s shout of victory, of power, of triumph.

Then in our gospel reading we have another king. This time it’s the King of Kings, Jesus himself. Like in the psalm, there’s a procession. We see Jesus riding on a colt or a donkey, and the people laying their coats and some palm leaves on the road.

We find it hard to think about people laying their coats in the road these days as a sign of honor or respect...But there is a famous legend about Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Humphry Gilbert laying their coats in front of the queen of England so that she could walk through a mud puddle without getting dirty. And, of course, at most weddings today they roll out a long runner of cloth for the wedding party to walk on, and a little girl will come along and sprinkle flower petals on it. So maybe that part about coats and palms really isn't all that unusual for a special person or a special occasion.

So anyway, there are a lot of similarities between our two scripture readings. We have a king...We have a procession...We have cheering crowds...We have happiness and popularity and triumph...Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!

But there is a difference. A big difference. The difference is what comes next. The king in the psalm marches into the city, into the temple in triumph, with a happy crowd following all the way and a joyous celebration awaiting. King Jesus is riding in triumph, with a happy crowd following all the way to the gate of the city, but no farther.

Did you ever notice that? The crowd is outside of Jerusalem, not in the city. No one comes with Jesus into Jerusalem, or at least not any big crowd. In the Bible it says that Jesus goes to the temple and looks around a bit, but it's late so he leaves. Jerusalem is closed for the day, or at least that's how I picture it. In the Gospel reading, there's no one waiting to welcome Jesus to town. In fact, he's in enemy territory - and on his own.

So of these two images, the king of the Psalms and King Jesus in the gospel reading, which are we? Which sounds more like the authentic Christian life? For me, I'd say the answer is both of them.

I don't know how you felt when you were coming in to church this morning, but probably none of you had anyone waving palms and laying coats in front of you. However you felt, though, I hope you felt better once you arrived here. I hope you came through the doors into a place where you're welcomed, where people are glad to see you. I hope you found someone to talk to if it's been a hard week, someone to give you a hand if you need some help.

I hope that when you came through our gates here that you found a place where people are trying to be kind to each other, trying to treat each other right. I hope you found a place of joy, a place of celebration, a place where people love God and know how important it is to share that love. I hope you found a place where people want to share the light of Jesus with the world, where people want to live out the Sermon on the Mount. I hope you felt like the King in our reading from the Psalm, coming into the temple.

But soon the service will be over. You will be leaving this place to go back into the world in which we all live. It is then that I hope you feel like King Jesus.

Not alone. The scripture doesn't say Jesus felt alone. Jesus knew he had God with him, just like we do. Not frightened. The scripture doesn't say Jesus was frightened, or worried, or cautious, or doubtful, or anything even remotely like that.

When I read the scripture about Jesus entering Jerusalem, I get a picture in my mind of a man who has a job to do. He knows where he's going, he knows what will happen when he gets there, he knows what he has to do, and he's willing to do it because it's God's command and because of the blessings it will bring to the people that he loves.

I want us to feel like we have a job to do because we do. I want us to feel like we have a purpose, because we do. I want us to feel like we have a mission, because we do.

When I was in BVS and living in Nappanee, Indiana, I attended Turkey Creek Church of the Brethren. It was a small church, but it had a good softball team. While I was there a sign was posted on each door going out of the sanctuary and each door going out of the church, "You are now entering the mission field."

Jesus Christ had a mission when he entered Jerusalem. He knew that it involved supper, and washing feet, and a betrayal. He knew it involved arrest, and trial, and the cross. He knew it involved death, but then resurrection and new life, new hope, new everything. Not just for himself and his followers, but for anyone who wanted it. That was Jesus's mission.

It's our mission too. To share the good news of God's love. To bind up the wounded and heal the sick and clothe the naked and feed the hungry and comfort the lonely and visit the prisoners. To bring peace and reconciliation between people and people, and between people and God.

The world needs that. The world needs the gospel. The world doesn't always know that it needs the gospel, so the mission can feel lonely. It can feel like you're not reaching anyone with your life and God's love. It can feel like you'll never make a difference.

But then, at the end of the weekend, you get to come through those gates again. You come back to the church to praise, to worship, hopefully to be refreshed and re-energized, to be loved and supported and healed and encouraged and all the things that you need to get you ready for another week in the mission field.

We come in through the gates the way the king did in the Psalm. We go out the way Christ did. We come in seeking blessing and hope and joy. We go out to share that blessing, hope and joy. We come in through the gates with needs. We go out through the gates with a mission. We come in through the gates hungry. We go out through the gates fed. Amen.

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