

Sermon Palm/Passion Sunday 2020

April 5, 2020

Matthew 21:1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the reading from our Passion procession from Matthew 21. Amen.

In the beatitudes, our Lord Jesus tells us “**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**” Of course that’s not what we’re taught in this life, is it? And in worldly terms that makes sense. The world owes us nothing. It is a dog eat dog world since the fall. We see around us how there is a threat around us on every side. All over there are the factors that would seek to take from us because of the scarcity of resources that exist and in that scarcity would prevent our abundance. And as we are aware of this hardship, as we’re aware of the fact that the world doesn’t owe us anything, on the one hand that’s good for us to grasp. As we grasp it, it helps us not to take on a mentality of victimhood. With this understanding, then we can expect that hardship is the reality and it’s not that person’s job there to make sure I respond in an appropriate way. In that, we learn responsibility for ourselves. On the other hand, if we’re not vigilant, it can also create the understanding that if we want anything we can only get what we take from others. In either case, pride can and often does come about.

If it’s up to me and not someone else, then whatever I get I got because of MY ingenuity, I got because of MY hard work, I got because I have been that much more responsible than someone else. And in this pride, I am not humble. I am not meek.

The crowd who surrounded the Lord Jesus that first Palm Sunday wanted that kind of king. They wanted the kind of king who was going to take back by force what was theirs. They wanted the king who was going to rally the troops up to take back the kingdom of Israel from the Romans. That’s what they thought the Messiah was going to do. They thought He was going to bring about this earthly kingdom, where there would be autonomy for Israel for an extended reign.

And earthly kingdoms are what we expect too, aren’t they? By that I don’t mean that we literally expect that we will be given a kingdom, but we expect that we will have earthly benefits. Look at how we are all responding to the various aspects of our current circumstances. The government responded too quickly, they didn’t respond quickly enough. Our freedoms are being restricted too much, they should have things

be stricter. The needs of protecting people from getting sick need to have priority, the needs for the economy must have priority. The states should have autonomy in this, the federal government needs to take the reins. What do we expect?

If we're being honest, we expect the same thing that crowd expected: we expect God to give us this earthly kingdom, to give us all the comfort and security and health and wealth we could ever want. And if we can't have that, we expect, that He will at least give us the clear roadmap so that we'll know how to get it, or as close to it as we can.

I have a friend who is a pastor who posted on Facebook this week, I think making this point. If I understood him correctly, he was rightly lamenting that as pastors we are in a position where we can't do the job we are called to do. Our job is to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments of our Lord Jesus such that His sheep are nurtured in them and given faith and the forgiveness of sins through them. Why? Because where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation. And in the midst of this crisis, we're not being permitted to preach that Word that you all can gather around it. I'm thankful for the way we can disseminate that Word as we're able, but it's not the same. Then there are those pastors who have sheep of their flock who nearing their admittance in the eternal kingdom have no earthly under-shepherd to speak that comfort in their ear face to face.

It was interesting as my friend was making this point, though, because a part of it was to say that so many have ideas as to how this should work then, without real regard for the sadness of the situation. So what did people say on his comments? "Oh well, Pastor, if you would just do it this way, or that way, it's all good." But my friend is right. It's not good! It won't be good! And in this life we think it will. Don't get me wrong, there is an abundance of blessing, and I don't want to minimize that. We are surrounded by blessings all around, as Job said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh, blessed be the Name of the Lord." So to be clear, I am not ungrateful. Or maybe it's better to say I am not as ungrateful as I perhaps sound. I'm just trying to make the point that our expectation for this life is paradise.

And that's the king the crowd wanted. They wanted the paradise king. They wanted the king who would give them that paradise now. The king who would help them take it in a glorious storm of pomp and royal regalia so that they could rule. But that's not this King Jesus. No. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

And Jesus is meek. He is the meek King who rides into Jerusalem on the meek, the humble donkey. Why? Because He is the King who shall inherit the earth. And how? Through riding that donkey on a battle campaign and overrunning the powers that be? No. But by turning His cheek and taking the scourging for sin. By being crowned with thorns and mocked in a false purple robe. By being nailed to a cross, suffering for the rebellion of humanity against the God who had given them paradise on this earth.

But you see this inheriting the earth, isn't what we would think. It's not this kingdom that rules over the world. No His kingdom is not of this earth, just like He told Pilate the day He died. His goal isn't to overtake Rome or Greece or Persia. No, it's to overtake the real tyrants, sin, death, and the devil.

And in the resurrection of this King, we see that's just what He's done. This Jesus has won over them. He's won over the occupants in this world who have taken it by force, so that these enemies will become His footstool as it said in the Psalm we read Wednesday.

At my previous congregation, we had a cross over the altar that was Jesus on the cross, but it wasn't Him naked and wearing the crown of thorns. Obviously, I appreciate that, I appreciate the reminder that a crucifix is, but this was a good reminder too. It was Jesus on the cross with a glorious crown, wearing a chasuble, a stole and an alb. This was to make the point that Jesus reigns from that cross. He reigns there with the forgiveness of sins, and He reigns as that forgiveness is given through His called ministers, those wearing the stole and robes who speak that forgiveness in the ears of His people.

Of course, all of this, then is to point the New Heavens and the New Earth that this Jesus will inherit as the meek King. And as I say that, I want to make that point. When we look at eternity in the Scriptures, so often we think about our soul being in heaven with Jesus. Or worse than that, we just think of our soul living in this eternal joy with our loved ones, with no consideration for our Lord. But that's the picture Scripture gives us: we are with Jesus in the New Creation. Our bodies will be raised from the dead, and we'll live with our Lord. That will be our paradise. But, as we're not to expect that this will be paradise here, we have the certainty and the sure hope that as Jesus promises His goodness and forgiveness to us now, then we will reign with Him in that Kingdom, we will reign with Him in that New Heaven and the New Earth.

So as we say that, we have to make two points from this. First, this is so comforting for us. It's comforting not just because it brings to our realization that this

hope is eternal. While that is the real joy, the joy of knowing that what we endure now is temporal and what will be then will last forever. Temporal is short, eternal is long because it's forever. There's comfort there. But because we're so oriented toward our experience now, this is comforting, because we know that this Humble King who loved us so much that He died for our sin now reigns as King in Heaven. He now rules over all things. And that means that when we endure the struggles and trials of this life. When we endure sickness and tribulation, we do so under the King whose love is so deep, we can know that He will never leave us nor forsake us in the midst of it. In other words, the comfort comes because there is a real assurance of Christ's reign now, and that is a reign over us in His love. That's first.

The second point is to ask how we might obtain this. And how is this ours? How will we be able to obtain this paradise that we so desire now. Well, we obtain it through our own death like our Lord's death, through our own cross. To be clear, by that I don't mean that we have to be crucified on a literal cross like Jesus was. No, but I do mean that we have to die to ourselves. We have to die to our sin. We have to die to our pride, we have to die to our rebellion against this God. This means that we die in faith. I don't mean merely that we have to die believing in Jesus. We do. But I also mean that this faith is our death. As our Lord Jesus baptizes us, He speaks His Spirit into our hearts, and joins us to His death. Our death is there in His tomb. But our humility, our meekness must be such that we acquiesce to the reality that our sin is offensive to God, that it deserves His temporal and eternal punishment. It also acquiesces to the reality that if we would rise to new life and the inheritance of the earth it comes by nothing we can do, but by what Jesus Himself has done. And as He speaks that faith to us in His Word and feeds it to us in His body and blood, we die even more to be given life all the more in Him. But this is in the humility that trusts not our own ability. No it meekly trusts His Word, His Work, and His promises.

You see this is our King. This is Jesus. The humble and meek King who rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday. And as the meek are blessed in that they will inherit the earth, He has been the meekest of all. In that He has won the Kingdom for us. By His grace, we give thanks that He blesses us not only in His humility, but in His grace. In the lack of paradise that we have, may He draw our eyes always to this goodness and His kingdom, the meekest of all. Yes blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Amen.