

April 14, 2019

Hopes and Expectations

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto thee. Oh Lord! Our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

Palm Sunday, the Sunday of the Passion, is the most unique Sunday celebration that we have throughout the whole church year. What makes it truly unique is our participation in the readings, in the Liturgy of the palms, the procession, when it's weather permitting, but the most unique thing is trying to put together the two distinct instances in Jesus' life.

One, the triumphal entry, where Jesus and his disciples are coming to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. It's a time when the population of Jews in Jerusalem went from a couple of hundred thousand to about a million. As Jews throughout the known world who had been dispersed during the Babylonian diaspora, would come if they were able to make the proper sacrifice to celebrate the Passover. That unique time of their life. The remembrance of God coming to them when they cried out as Hebrews in Egypt he came and turned the heart of Pharaoh. Who with his servant Moses, then led the chosen people of God out of slavery, through the wilderness, and ultimately into this land of promise.

And so for the Passover, if you could travel to Jerusalem, if you could travel to the temple, you would go. And you would make the proper sacrifice with the lamb without blemish. And you would eat the Passover meal, and you would remember that instant that you got your identity as the people of covenant and the chosen people of God.

Now, what we have going on in this triumphal entry, is the people that were already there, being in mind of the freedom that they had received because of God's leadership. The very event that they were now celebrating. They were expectant and they were hopeful that the Messiah that they looked for, longed for, would be coming. A Messiah who was a king like King David. A Messiah that would lead them to be again the great nation that they had once been under David. That they would become free again. Free from the Roman tyranny. Free to become the nation, a great nation among the nations.

So you had already in this city, that was bursting at the seams with people, a hope and an expectation. And then you have Jesus and his disciples and they're coming for the same purpose. They're gonna celebrate the Passover, at least that's what it seems to any observer. But they are coming with a different set of hopes and expectations. Jesus has prepared, at least his closest disciples, for what is about to come. He has told them, on more than one occasion, that he would be handed over to the chief priests. That he was going to Jerusalem, where he would be turned over, he would be tried, he would be convicted, and he would ultimately die.

But the hope and expectation that they were bringing with them into the city was a different kind of freedom, a different kind of hope. Their hope was that the Kingdom of God that they'd heard so much about, as Jesus taught them, the glimpses of the Kingdom of God that they had seen in the miracles that

he performed before the people, that now it would begin. That what would happen there, would usher in the Kingdom of God here and now, at least partially.

So that was their hope. That was their expectation. They too were looking for freedom. But not freedom from the slavery, the oversight of Romans. They are looking for the promise of freedom from sin. They are looking for that event by which their sins will be forgiven, and they will have the freedom to be the citizens of God's Kingdom. The children of God that Jesus has been speaking of for these three years.

And so you have, as they are coming into Jerusalem, the disciples very excited about what should happen. What might happen. What could happen. And they are recognizing him as not just King of the Jews, but King of Kings! They know that in entering the city it could be the time when Jesus would be exalted; when he would enter into his Kingdom. And they are very excited. They are letting him ride in on a colt, and they are putting their cloaks on the road so that it could travel over them. It's a sign and symbol of the conquering King coming into the city.

And the expectant ones in the city are ready. Who probably don't know Jesus, probably hadn't heard much or anything about Jesus, get caught up in the excitement. Hosanna in the highest! Here is the King! Here is the Messiah! Here is the one who will lead us! Not realizing that their hope and expectation was different from the disciples who were coming into the city with Jesus. Who had started the chants, who had started the celebration, if you will, as they come to observe and celebrate the Passover, not fully understanding that it was also the time when Jesus' prophecy of being arrested and suffering and crucified would come to pass.

But you can begin to see why the cries, the shouts, of 'Hosanna!', so quickly turned to shouts and cries of 'Crucify Him!' The expectations of the people who were in the city, perhaps even the hopes of the chief priests, were not being fulfilled. Not only did Jesus not come in and pay homage to the chief priests, he confronts them. He confronts what is going on in the temple with the moneychangers, with the people who have the animals for the sacrifices. He doesn't come in talking like a King who is about to lead the people against the Romans, or against other nations. He comes in still speaking about a Kingdom of God. A Kingdom that begins not with his victory in battle, but his victory through death and resurrection.

That's not what the people wanted. That's not freedom that they hoped for. That's not the freedom that they expected. And yet it was the freedom that Jesus was bringing. And so that disappointment as they grew closer and closer to that Passover when the chief priests were more and more worried about losing authority and power over the people. And then to the idea that it was expedient for one to die for all. That it was easier to have Jesus arrested. That it was easier to have him killed. And they would wait and they would look for their idea, and their understanding, their expectation, and their hope of a Messiah who was a King, and who would battle for them.

When hopes and expectations conflict, there's only the true hopes and the true expectations that are eventually fulfilled, that come forward. And that is what we are traveling towards. We begin with the shouts of 'Hosanna!', but as long as our hopes and expectations are not in line with the scriptures and with what Jesus brought into the world, then we too can end up being disappointed. We too can end up saying, 'Crucify the true Lord, and we'll wait for another Messiah.'

Too often in the church, the hopes and expectations appear to be, 'I hope for eternal life. I am afraid of what follows this life. I'm afraid of what follows death. My hope and expectation is that what Jesus has offered is an assurance that during this life I might be protected, insulated from the evil that is in the world. Set apart from the troubles of the world, so that I might make it through in peace, for me and my family. And that when I finally die, at a nice old age, that I might have eternal life.'

That's a reasonable hope. It's not a very reasonable expectation. What is it that we should hope for? What is it that we should expect? As citizens of God's Kingdom, ushered in by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, what is the hope and the expectation that he seems to present to the people? To present to the church? This community that he created? It's not about the life after this life. It's about the freedom from our sins. The slavery of our sinfulness. It's about the promise of forgiveness. It's about the promise of following God, and being so united with the Holy Spirit, that we become the very gift that Jesus talks about. The gift of life. The gift of forgiveness. The gift of justice, and mercy, and peace in the world. We are to become, and we hope and expect to become, the vessels through which justice, mercy, compassion, fearlessness comes through.

We are called to hope and expect to be changed by the Gospel. To be changed by the very presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So that we no longer fear not having enough, but recognizing the blessings that have come into our lives. Do not be afraid to offer to others from the gifts that we have been given. To know and understand that when we share that which we have been given, we are not diminished, but we are fulfilled as God's children and citizens of God's Kingdom.

That is the hope and expectation that Jesus seems to present to his followers. That in what he has shown in his life: his obedience to God, his giving of himself, his sharing of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit, is the pattern of life that we are to live. It is what we are to become. To share with the world. To not worry about the life that comes next. That's a promise that is given. That is a promise that you have.

You've never been given the promise that you will be insulated from the world. You've been given the promise that you will never face the world alone. That God will walk with you. That those who have heard the Gospel, who have been touched by the Holy Spirit, will walk with you. To lend their strength, to lend their hopes, to lend all that they have so that we all might make this journey together. So that we never turn to the cries, 'Crucify Him!', but only to the cries of, 'Hosanna!'. To recognize that the King, the Messiah, that we know, that we worship, has given us a freedom that the world cannot give. To know that as we recognize our lies and our sins, that we are forgiven, and that we move closer to becoming the very children of God that we have been called to be.

What are your hopes? What are your expectations as you follow Jesus? As you welcome him in triumphant? My prayer is the hope of forgiveness, the expectation of becoming God's child, and to know that you are called to be the vessel of the Gospel that leads others to those same hopes, to those same expectations, and to that true freedom that only a risen Christ can offer.

Gregory Hein, Rector