

Sermon *Rocks, Stones and Boulders*

Palm Sunday, April 1, 2007-05-07

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As the sun grew bright in the sky and the people of Jerusalem came out to the gates to investigate the rumours that they had heard about a man from the north, they encountered a sight that rekindled the hope that had been so long stomped out by generations of foreign rule. In that moment they gazed out from the gates of the city and coming down the orchard-hills of Bethany was the vision of Zechariah manifested before them “your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey.”

And they were ready to welcome the triumphant king, the victorious king. They did not recognize what the triumph was or what victory had been won, but they were ready to celebrate and welcome in the king.

“Hosanna!”, they shouted, “Hosanna to the King of kings, the son of David!” Soon the street were full of the noise of the event and the people crowded close to Jesus and grabbed palm branches to wave and to lay before him. Here it seems is the fruition of John the Baptist’s call from the Jordan: “Make a way for the Lord!” They laid down their coats, they made a good path on top of the rough gravel and rocks so that his way would be gentle and neither he nor his steed would stumble.

Already the rumours had done their work. Everyone had heard about the miraculous feats of this man Jesus. Feeding whole crowds without much in the way for source of food, people that had once had just about every malady possible – from leprosy to blindness to mysterious demon possession – all cured by a simple gesture, the touch of his hand, or even his spoken will. His words reached ahead of him as his teaching spread and people recalled to one another what they had heard. The streets had been a buzz with whispers about this man for some

time, both rich and poor had encountered him in other places and been impressed even if they were challenged by what he was saying and doing. More than a celebrity, like our pop stars or movie actors are for us today, Jesus was a ‘people’s’ hero!

But the latest news was the most startling. A friend of Jesus’ had died while Jesus was away, and Jesus had come at the time of his friend’s mourning. Even though this man, a wealthy man by many accounts, had then been dead three days and decay was upon him, this man Jesus had asked that the tomb be opened. And this Jesus, in spite of convention and custom, stood at the unclean steps of a dead man’s tomb and spoken into it and prayed to God, and then the miracle that was an ultimate sign occurred. Jesus came back from the portal of the man Lazarus’ tomb with Lazarus walking and alive beside him. The dead indeed were raised by this man, who could not be considered just any man.

And so it was, even though it was the days leading up to the celebration of the Passover and the temple should have been full of worshipers the people of the city poured out towards the gate to welcome this great man.

And so over pebbles and rocks they laid their cloaks. They shouted: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” The signs were complete, and all the roles that the prophets had laid out were complete. The work had been made absolutely clear. Jesus had to be the Messiah, everything fit the description. And so they laid down their cloaks before the one who had come to fulfill prophecy, and bring the people back to God, back to glory, back to self-rule. They could lay down their cloaks when things made sense and Jesus seemed to fit their expectations, but what became of that hope and faith as the day progressed.

Jesus, had prepared for this event, and could see each element in its place. He knew where the colt would be and that the person who owned it would give it over for the purpose of Jesus entry in to the Holy City. The disciples went ahead, and

again – as the Baptizer John had shouted – prepared the way for the Lord. They laid their cloaks upon the colt, having grown to know they could give up their cloaks. When these disciples had learned prayer from Jesus they also had learned that when one takes your coat, give to him your cloak. They had learned that when they are forced to walk a league with someone they should walk two. Now they walked into the Holy City with Jesus ready to give up all they had, they led and followed willing to march whatever endless miles lay ahead. They would walk these rock strewn roads in whatever state he asked them to walk, but were they ready to face what lay ahead.

For what was waiting for them ahead were not more rocky roads, but the blunt challenge of hewn stone. Jesus had come into the Holy City of God to face to challenge the faith and rewrite the religion of God's people. There was no cloak that could be laid on the path after the stones of the temple. To fulfill his work Jesus said that the stones of the temple would have to be torn down, so that even the 'high-place' would be a road.

The laying of cloaks and palms ended at the gate of the temple. Jesus got down off of his steed and entered into a far greater challenge. It was here that the disciples – despite all their bickering and doubts of the past – began to break apart. Jesus was to be the fulfillment of what was taught in the temple, not the destruction of it. Jesus was to be the Saviour of the people, but what was seen was an attack on what they had believed to be true.

But this would not be the end, for even the challenge of the temple would not be enough. The greater obstacle ahead was the looming doubt of the tomb. The disciples, scattered afraid and confused were barred from even the body of their teacher, their friend, the one whom they proclaimed to be the messiah. Nothing could be cast over the tomb or waved in front of that boulder in celebration any

longer. There at the boulder, the barring moment of faith, our Lord is not longer surrounded by those who loved him, but surly foreign keepers.

Much of our journey of faith, though trying, is like those rock-strewn roads. We lay down our cloaks of worship, praise and prayer and humble obedience before Christ and welcome into our lives. But we have to also be ready, because Christ will challenge our understanding, and will force us to rely on faith, and not on what we think about Jesus and how WE feel he fits our needs for a messiah. Even the temple of your faith may have to be shaken, and its stones taken down. But even when your faith is challenged, it is not there that freedom is found.

For even more, we must recognize that even when we encounter challenges we to what we believe to be true, we also have to encounter the boulder that lays before us in the challenge of death itself and be a part of the ultimate miracle that awaits us beyond it. It is in getting past the boulder that we encounter true freedom, true hope, faith and love; these are the miracles that Jesus truly has come to perform for God's people, and in these miracles are all prophecies fulfilled.

On our own we can barely get past the challenges of faith; the building blocks of stone that we have laid and cemented. On our own we CANNOT get through the challenge of the tomb; we ourselves cannot get past death. We may lay our lives before the Lord when our path in life seems to join with him, but once we have welcomed him in are we indeed ready to go the rest of the way – his way – with him?

Before the city – if we continue reading in Luke's Gospel – Jesus comes to weep upon the city that was receiving him with such joy, as he weeps for us at the advent of our faith. Christ knows the advent of faith can be exciting and seemingly full of uplifting and exciting. Yet in growth in faith - the true faith of believing in Christ Jesus - there are drastic challenges. Christ says, as he weeps over his people: "your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every

side, ⁴⁴and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will *not leave one stone* upon another in you; because you were unaware at the time of your appraisal.”

Yet, in Christ, is the gift of freedom that *comes*, and comes in the name of the Lord.

For each of you the challenge is ongoing, as it is for all who seek to believe. What will you do when you face the challenge of your faith? Will you deny Christ? Will you betray Him? Will you abandon Him? Are you ready to face the final obstacle, and fulfill the faith anointed on you, in body and spirit, in your baptisms? To face death, and the obstacle it is for earthly life, we must also face the resurrection and the obstacle we sometimes make it to be in accepting the gift of eternal life.