

The Coming Kingdom

Mark 11:1-11

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Those who preceded Jesus on that first Palm Sunday morning and those who came immediately after cried out in loud voices:

Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor, David!

I am struck by the second of the two phrases: Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor, David.

David had lived ten centuries before the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet, those ten centuries in between were laced with an expectation that God would come into the world to establish a lasting peace, to place a hunger for peace in the hearts and minds of all humanity, that young and old would be persuaded to choose life, to choose love, to choose to be the blessed community. So the expectations were running high. Surely, this Jesus of Nazareth was the one to usher in the long-awaited kingdom.

As the crowd processed into Jerusalem crying out, “Blessed is the coming kingdom...” the people would have been picturing in their minds a wolf and a lamb lying down together with an absence of fear, a sword beaten into a plowshare, a desert blooming with cactus blossoms, a pantry where the flour and oil never run out.

Over the previous three years of apprenticeship, following Jesus from village to village, watching him love the world into a new way of being; the growing number of disciples had seen glimpses of the kingdom with their own eyes!

These men and women and youth and children, spreading leafy branches they had cut in the fields, had seen in him what their ancestors had been longing for since the time of King David. And they all wanted to be a part of the kingdom, accountable for keeping it going, paying it forward, alive to its promise.

You and I are the descendents of those first Palm Sunday celebrators! We may not have come to church today with an image of a wolf and a lamb lying down together or of a sword beaten into a farmer's plow or of a desert blooming, but we do come with our own images of the kingdom, our own hopes for life lived as God hopes it will be lived! I know I come with such images in my mind and in my heart.

The first image I have of the kingdom is a community where everyone has adequate health care. This is NOT a political statement. This is a faith statement. What I see in Jesus is one who was constantly 'out there' tending to the wounds of the world: physical wounds, emotional wounds, spiritual wounds. Almost every page of the four Gospels includes a healing narrative where someone is on the receiving end of affordable health care.

When I was a boy growing up in South Glastonbury in the 1950's, we had a physician like that. His name was Dr. Earle. Many of you know his daughter, Hallie Hollister. Or you have walked through the park, just up the street, baring his name. Dr. Earle would show up at your house with his black bag and his stethoscope, and if you had a fever or a rash or nausea or a migraine or a sprained ankle, Dr. Earle had something in his bag to remedy the situation. He made health care available. And he made it affordable, too. If you didn't have the cash, you could give him a chicken from the coop or an apple pie from the oven or a firm handshake from the heart.

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.” I feel like shouting this out loud whenever I see the evidence of adequate health care, available and affordable to all. This is the kind of ministry that got Jesus crucified. It is still the kind of ministry for which I am an advocate.

The second image I have of the kingdom is a local church where commitments are made to mission partners and then those commitments are honored no matter what the state of the economy may be. If you were to ask me to name a most precious moment in all the Bible stories, I would leap instantly to that scene with the 5000 hungry people who have been listening all day to Jesus teach. He sees they are hungry. The disciples see that they have only a few loaves and two fish. It is a bad economy. They plead with him asking, ‘what are these few groceries among so many hungry people?’ They respond from the place of scarcity. Jesus takes the bread and fish, prays over it, hands it over to the twelve, instructs them to deliver it. He can not, will not turn his back on anyone who is hungry. He is not stymied by the shortage of groceries because he operates out of a place of abundance. The precious moment in the story I love so much is what I imagine to be the look on the disciples’ faces as they realize that every one of the 5000 is well fed and that there are twelve baskets of leftovers to boot!

The kingdom comes whenever a local church says YES to a mission partner and then is not daunted by the latest budget report or the latest bankruptcy news or the latest Dow Jones Industrial Average or the latest estimate of the Gross national Product. The kingdom comes whenever a local church refuses to ignore anyone who is hungry.

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.” I feel like shouting this out loud whenever I see the evidence of mission commitments made and kept. This is the kind of ministry that got Jesus crucified. It is still the kind of ministry for which I am an advocate.

The third image I have of the kingdom is spelled out in that memorable Aretha Franklin song: R – E – S – P – E – C – T.

The kingdom of God is not located on any map or globe, is not found in an atlas or at any intersection of latitude and longitude. It can not be located with a GPS device. The kingdom is found wherever there is respect: respect for self, respect for neighbor, respect for planet earth. What sells newspapers is the evidence of disrespect. What grows churches is the evidence of respect embodied.

Whenever a teacher or a principal or a student refuses to tolerate bullying, the kingdom breathes a sigh of relief. Whenever someone places yesterday’s newspaper in the recycling bin, the kingdom breathes a sigh of relief. Whenever someone looks within him or herself and sees that God has knit together a precious creature, worthy of self-respect, the kingdom breathes a sigh of relief.

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.” I feel like shouting this out loud whenever I see the evidence of respect made real. Even this kind of ministry contributed to Jesus getting himself crucified. He was always demonstrating respect for those whom the community had rejected. It is still the kind of ministry for which I am an advocate.

This is a Palm Sunday day! It’s a day for lending our voices to the echo of all the ages: **“Blessed is the coming of the kingdom of our ancestor David.”** In the greatest of hope, Amen!