

“Isaiah Saw Jesus’ Glory!”

A Sermon for Holy Tuesday

March 18, 2008

Texts: Psalm 71:1-12 / Isaiah 49:1-6 / 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 / John 12:37-50

Today is Tuesday during Holy Week. In Mark’s Gospel (the only one of the Gospels to clearly delineate each day during Jesus Christ’s last week on earth), Tuesday is the longest day of Holy Week. It fills some 115 verses, whereas the next longest day is only half as voluminous, 60 verses. First thing Tuesday morning, Jesus finishes the parable of the Fig Tree as his followers see it withered to the roots. This is supposed to represent for us the bankruptcy of the religious elite in Judaism, but is also a warning for us that our leaders also not be lead into spiritual and dogmatic bankruptcy. Then, Jesus arrives back in Jerusalem after spending the night in Bethany and enters the open outer courts of the temple to begin his teaching. It is a day when Jesus drives out the money changers from the temple courts; His authority is challenged repeatedly by the chief priests, scribes, and elders; He tells the parable of the vinegrowers and the heir; he tells the leaders to look on their coinage and render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to the Lord what is the Lord’s; he shows the religious elite how misguided they are in the interpretation of Scripture; He is queried about the foremost of the religious Laws and replies with the Shema from Deuteronomy 6 (Mark 12:29-31) –

29 Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **30** And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ **31** The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

He gives the great example of generous giving through highlighting the widow’s mite or penny; and then He caps His teaching with a powerful rendering of His future and His coming in glory – what is often called the little apocalypse. In this unusual passage in Mark 13, Jesus uses strange expressions like “abomination of

desolation” and “tribulation,” and then He equates Himself with the Son of Man in Daniel chapter 7 and foresees a bright future for all Christians (Mark 13:26-27, 29-32),

26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. **27** And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that He is near, at the very gates. **30** Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. **31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

It is a day of physical action, emotional exhilaration, constant challenge from the authorities, and ends with the promise of a just, triumphant and glorious future. Jesus looks past even His impending death – a death that will seem at first to be an ignominious defeat -- to His coming again in glory.

In light of this, our reading from John’s Gospel is also startling. It is firstly about unbelief and how we can so easily rationalize what we do and don’t believe. St. John states clearly that there were those who had seen Jesus perform miracles and heard His teachings, and yet still did not believe who He said He was. And, even more startling is the quote from Isaiah which says, in effect, God Himself has blinded some people’s eyes. God Himself hardens hearts.

And then, John boldly states (in verse 41) that “Isaiah said these things because he saw His [Jesus]’ glory and spoke of Him [Jesus].” Do you get that? Isaiah, some 700 years before Christ spoke of Him and particularly in this instance, as it is found in Isaiah’s Book, chapter 6, verse 10:

Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,

and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”

This is Isaiah, quoting the words of God. So, in effect, Isaiah is saying that those who refuse to know Jesus, even after being presented with all the facts and a winsome Christ, these folks are in God’s own hands. He takes full responsibility for hardening their hearts and blinding their eyes. We can present Christ to our neighbor, we can host events that will seek to bring folks to church and back to church, but, in the end, salvation and discipleship are up to the Lord. So, if people don’t believe, that is the Lord’s doing. And that also means that if people **do** believe, and people are drawn to St. John’s that that is equally **His** doing and not ours. And I believe that is very freeing and humbling.

The Gospel goes on to say that even in spite of the lack of popularity of Christ among the ruling elite, still “many even of the authorities believed in Him.” And, then, a subtle warning that we not do as those who are in the religious elite did, that we not seek first the glory that comes from man over and above the glory that comes from God.

Finally, notice the utter submission of The Son. Again and again He states that it is not about looking toward Him or listening to His words, or believing in Him, but always He is pointing to the Father. His authority is not His own, but comes from the Father. His commandments are not His own, but His Father’s. His actions are not His own, but His Father’s. His strength is not His own, but His Father’s. Jesus was perfectly submitted to the Father, just as we are called to be perfectly to submitted to the Son and through Him to the Father.

This Holy Week, Christ is calling you and me to follow Him...to follow Him in a deeper way than you’ve ever followed Him. To submit to Him all of your life, even the stuff you may be tempted to keep just for yourself. He wants all of you. And, in return, He will allow your eyes to be opened and your heart to be softened so that you will see even more clearly what is **His** purpose and then **your** purpose in this life. And all of this will be so that the Name of Jesus will be above every name, and that

all people will see Christ's glory, just as the prophet Isaiah saw His glory some 2700 years ago.

The alternative is a gradual hardening of your heart and blinding of your eyes and concomitant lessening of your effectiveness in God's plan. The alternative is a life emptied of purpose and fulfillment.

We must not be as the fig tree Jesus passed on Tuesday morning, withered at the roots; but instead be a spring of Living Water, filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit and flowing out the door of this Church into the community. My prayer for you today is that each and every person be carried by that tide of Living Water out of this Church tonight. To Christ be all the glory! *Amen.*