

BLESS THE COMING KINGDOM!

Mark 11:1-11

April 9, 2006

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When I started preparing to share with you today, I thought of Tina Turner. Some of you know Tina Turner? She has had quite a hard and mixed-up life. I thought of her comeback song “*What’s love got to do with it?*” I thought of that song because I anticipated a question you might have. What’s Palm Sunday got to do with it? What’s it got to do with your daily life? Then I pulled up Tina Turner’s lyrics:

*You must understand
That the touch of your hand
Makes my pulse react
That it’s only the thrill
Of boy meeting girl
Opposites attract*

*It’s physical
Only logical
You must try to ignore
That it means more than that*

*[Chorus]
Oh what’s love got to do, got to do with
it
What’s love but a second hand emotion
What’s love got to do, got to do with it
Who needs a heart
When a heart can be broken*

*It may seem to you
That I’m acting confused
When you’re close to me*

*If I tend to look dazed
I’ve read it someplace
I’ve got cause to be*

*There’s a name for it
There’s a phrase that fits
But whatever the reason
You do it for me*

[Chorus]

*I’ve been thinking of a new direction
But I have to say
I’ve been thinking about my own
protection
It scares me to feel this way*

*What’s love got to do, got to do with it
What’s love but a sweet old fashioned
notion
What’s love got to do, got to do with it
Who needs a heart when a heart can be
broken*

Tina calls love “*a second hand emotion,*” “*a sweet old fashioned notion,*” and repeats “*who needs a heart when a heart can be broken.*” We all experience heartbreak. We become disillusioned at some time. Sometimes, love appears beyond our grasp. We become unsettled

and unsure. We even fear love and commitment. Yet, the very author of love and life is the one who put the stars in the sky. The God who made planets and solar systems, water and earth is the God who made you and me out of love. Through all our pain and disappointment this great God is signaling something to you and me. In what happened so long ago on a day we call Palm Sunday, God made a show for the people then and for you and me now. Palm Sunday is not merely relevant to you in the large scheme of things; it is relevant to what's happening with your heart, with your daily routine and with what we've been doing here at Bethany.

We live on a planet of brokenness. An ill wind blows through our world. You don't have to move for change to happen. It happens all around you. Without changing a bit, you stand in a different place. Everything moves, even if you don't take a step. That is why you see such changes in our cultural views of morality and life. You may have once been in the mainstream; but if you don't change you'll be considered extreme. If you and I go with the flow, if we take the path of least resistance, of greatest ease, of no steps at all, we die. We see that with our bodies. To maintain my health, I've had to develop discipline in eating and exercise. Otherwise, the weight comes on and the health goes down. That also happens spiritually. Listen to this warning from the Bible:

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. (Hebrew 2:1, NIV)

The physical Law of Entropy or the Second Law of Thermodynamics describes nature's preference for disorder or chaos. The spiritual Law of Sin and Death describes the powerful forces of evil that bring disorder and chaos which destroy life and fellowship with God. We drift away from the source of life. There is a celestial conspiracy to create an atmosphere hostile to faith and life. Thus, in the gospel of Mark when Jesus and his disciples near Jerusalem, we read:

They were now on the way to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were filled with dread and the people following behind were overwhelmed with fear. (Mark 10:32, NLT)

For the first disciples, walking with Jesus brought fear. Since we suffer the same conspiracy, why wouldn't we suffer the same fears? Imagine, then, what happened when two disciples followed the insight that Jesus received from God. As they entered a village, they saw a donkey's colt that Jesus told them was there. They think, "Whoa." So they follow the instructions and untie the colt. Immediately, bystanders question them: "What are you doing?" They answer as Jesus told them: "The Lord needs it and will return it soon." The bystanders say, "Oh." The disciples are thinking, "They didn't ask what lord. Whoa. This is a God thing." Of course, they tell this to the rest; and as Jesus mounts the colt, the excitement explodes into yelling. They bless Jesus as God's anointed king. Crowds join them. Children chant. Palm branches wave. Coats are laid as carpet. Jerusalem stirs. Jesus goes to the temple where a king should be anointed or a pretender arrested; and... and... and... nothing happens. Jesus looks all around and there is nothing to do. It's late in the day, so he leaves Jerusalem and goes to Bethany. He wasn't anointed king. He wasn't arrested. Why the parade? God orchestrated it. God was the parade master. Why? God was sending us a signal. His Savior arrived to deliver and establish his kingdom on earth. On Good Friday Jesus said, "It is finished." That is when the veil in the temple split and the holy was no longer separated from the unholy.

In the cross Christ establishes his kingship. His reign begins in our repentance and forgiveness, not our idea of obedience. God breathes his Spirit into our hearts when we repent of our sinfulness, acknowledging its poison, and actively surrender our lives to Jesus' rule. We are born a second time. However, we don't live this new life by working hard. Instead, we become new as God reaches down and pulls us up.

It happens this way. God calls you holy. God is not a liar. God is not unrealistic. God names us what he expects us to become. Jesus begins governing our lives and reshaping who we are. God's pulling us up rather than we working ourselves up. It begins as we go to the cross, and it continues as we return to the cross. We are pulled up as we agree with Jesus about each sin and its damning power, and then receive forgiveness. He then meets us with His Spirit who tugs at our hearts with the Scriptures, with Christian brothers and sisters with impressions, dreams and even people like me. Our hearts change, and our expectations grow.

In a broken world our expectations as individuals and as a congregation are always lower than Gods. The diagonal line on the power point represents movement from lower expectations to higher ones. When God puts these higher expectations on us, it gets uncomfortable. We don't want to believe them or embrace them. We prefer to redefine them. We want to be known as believers. God wants us to be known as disciples. We want to call ourselves forgiven sinners. God calls us saints. We want to call ourselves lay people, you know... unprofessional; God calls us priests, the light of the world to show our neighbors the way, the salt of the earth that makes our community attractive for God to bless rather than reject in judgment.

Last Tuesday, I discussed this sermon in a small group. We discussed the discomfort of higher expectations. We may feel unsafe, even judged. Truthfully, we are never accepted as we are. We are loved as we are; but never accepted. We can't be accepted because our sins kill. As sinners, we can't be accepted until we offer a full and unconditional surrender. It's like walking into a counselor's office with a knife. There is no acceptance or help until we put the knife on the counselor's desk and say, "Help me." When we do that with Jesus and stop resisting him, he changes us. He moves us step by step into God's calling for us.

Over the last 6 years, I've been teaching, preaching, planning, and leading us to move from a congregation of lower expectations to a people of higher expectations. Lower expectations are the tendency of all congregations and all individuals because of the principle of sin and death. Do you want to know how high God's expectations are for us? The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4 that we are to reach to the full stature of Jesus Christ. He means that we are to exactly represent him in this world. That is the only way we can truly be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

When we raise expectations, we may feel judged. Conviction of sin feels like judgment. It isn't. Judgment is punishment. Conviction is God confronting and pulling us up. We may want to resist; but when we repent, we find grace and a new heart. Only at the cross where we repent and embrace forgiveness is Jesus' Spirit welcome.

As we discussed this sermon Tuesday, one participant thought I should begin the sermon with the words, "In summary..." I thought, "Aha, a shorter sermon!" The point, however, is in summary this is what we are doing. This is where we are headed. This is how we are changing and why occasionally you may feel unsettled.

I'm thankful for Tina Turner's song. She is more right than I first thought. Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken? Sin robs your heart of trust. It is at the cross where your heart, your belief and heaven's rule is restored.

The parade on Palm Sunday was more for you and me than Jesus. We live in the time of salvation. Jesus is making saints out of sinners, disciples out of believers, and priests out of followers. He is making us a bride worthy of God. We dare not settle for less. We dare not excuse anything less. The pull of Christ will bring us through the cross to a wholly new life. That is our life together.