

Who Is At Your Door?

God's House Calls:

Matthew 21:1-11

March 16, 2008

Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

Last Sunday afternoon, I joined several church families in sledding at Judd Hill. I saw some “sliders” take hard bumps. I wasn’t about to, so I chose a nice, soft snow tube. Within seconds of boarding the tube, I was flying off it into the air, crashing onto the hillside and rolling down it like a rag doll. People must not often witness 52-year-old men doing that because people reached for their cell phones. Now, a little sore and much wiser I carried the tube to the other side of the hill where it was smoother. I thought I’d stay on the tube this time. Slowly I pushed off and began the race down the hill... toward a utility pole and fence post. I thought if I make it between those I will be out of the park and in someone’s backyard, so I tried to go around them. Dragging a foot provided little steering, so I changed my goal. Don’t slam into either obstacle directly. Witnesses can tell you what I hit. All I know is that the tube stopped and I kept going... through several feet of small bushes. This time a different group reached for their cell phones; and singlehandedly, I robbed one witness of any courage he possessed to slide.

Now, do I know with certainty what God was saying and doing on that slope? I have an idea. I think there was warning and protection. I saw God’s care in the near-misses and in the kindness of others. How involved is God in the detail of your life? When do you see his hand? When do you hear God’s voice? When does God intervene in your affairs and change the outcome? Do you know, at least, some of the time?

The other day after a snow melt, I found ice on a step. I warned my wife and headed toward the car. Then something convinced me to turnaround, go to the icy spot, stand there and hold her arm. As I grabbed her arm, she fell hard; but she did not touch the ground. I believe she would have been seriously injured had I not stood there; and from my sledding exploits, you can surmise that I'm not overly cautious. I'm convinced God intervened despite my personal tendencies, and answered the prayers so many of you pray for us.

We Christians understand that God is so near that in him we live and move and have our being. He is not neutral. He is working toward the redemption of all. We also understand that God wants to be known. God came to the human race in Jesus. Jesus and the Father are one. God rode the young colt of a donkey into Jerusalem. The crowds, however, misidentified him.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:10-11, NIV)

The question was correct. The answer was not. Jesus was far more than a prophet from Nazareth, and the majority got it wrong. Consequently, the Apostle John wrote:

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. (John 1:10-12, NLT)

God is not content to be a hidden force in our lives. If he were, why would he enter Jerusalem in parade? If you don't want to be recognized, you don't ride in a parade.

We've heard lately about the paparazzi hounding Hollywood celebrities. In fact, the celebs often try to avoid recognition by donning sunglasses. I heard that the paparazzi are so bad, that a mosquito donned sunglasses. The little bug had just passed his screen test.

In contrast, God wants to be recognized. What did Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount? ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"*** (Matthew 5:8). Jesus is not

talking about being pure in heart and then seeing God after you die. According to the Scriptures, you won't need to be pure in heart to see God after you die. If that is what Jesus meant, his promise would be empty. Everybody is going to see God at some point after they die. No, Jesus' promise means that we will see God before we die. Indeed, the first Christians were taught by God himself. It took a resurrection for them to recognize this. What will it take for you and me?

In the days of Moses, the presence of God was visible by day through a cloud and by night through a fire in the cloud (Exodus 40:36-38). It settled on a tent-like Tabernacle and lifted when the people were to fold it up and move. In the days of Solomon, a cloud filled the temple upon its dedication so that the priests couldn't go in (2 Chronicles 5:13-14). It signaled that God would encounter people in that Temple. In the days of Jesus, the fullness God traveled in the promised Messiah, Jesus. As people seeking God with all their heart encountered him, they witnessed the compassion, power and wisdom of God.

On Palm Sunday, the fullness of God entered Jerusalem where the throne of rule and the temple of reconciliation were. There God provided the final sacrifice for our reconciliation and inaugurated his kingdom on a new throne, the hearts of human beings.

On the day of Pentecost, God made Christians his temple where he himself dwells. Fitted and functioning together they were taught by the Spirit of God. They saw God's love, power and mercy in the ministry gifts of their brothers and sisters in Christ. They moved from the status of seekers of God to the reality of being the body for Christ's Spirit, for God's presence to live and touch the world. Their chief concern was to walk with the Spirit in fellowship with God.

These Christians didn't just look for what the Scriptures once said. They looked at what the Spirit was saying to them through the Bible now. They didn't just look at what God once did for believers. They looked at what the Spirit was doing with them now. They considered what

faith the Spirit was giving them now. Again, their chief concern was to walk with the Spirit, to be guided by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25).

For us then to see God today, for us to welcome his ruling and forgiving presence, we must realize he's at our door. At one point in the Palm Sunday parade, Jesus saw the city of Jerusalem and wept over it. He knew his people were missing what God was doing. He said:

If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes... The days will come upon you when your enemies will... (destroy you) because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you. (Luke 19:42-44, NIV)

Jerusalem suffered so terribly because they got it wrong on Palm Sunday. God and their salvation were coming to them in such human trappings. Similarly, we need to recognize that that God and salvation are coming to us in human and frail trappings. We must see what the Holy Spirit is doing with one another. What kind of faith is God giving your brother and sister? How do you know it is God?

Remember that the pure in heart will see God. The Bible does not say the well-educated, highly skilled, or finely disciplined will see God. Is your heart pure? Or is it embroiled with provocations or divided in hope? Are you saddened with disappointment, sullied with guilt, sore with anger, or searching for approval? Are you seeing and hearing God in the gifts of your Christian brothers and sisters? Are you growing in confidence or fear? Purity requires testing and refining. Consequently, we must rid ourselves of bitterness and malice and realize that we are called to the circumstances of our lives.

Jesus summed the response for all humanity and all Christians: repent and believe. Let's do that.