

LENT WEEK 6 – Day 1

READING

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’

“But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’

“He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

“The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’

“‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

“The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’

“His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’

“His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’

“Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’

“‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’

“He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.’”

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and 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 build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

REFLECTION

A message that Randy Holm delivered a few years ago regarding this parable is seared into my mind. It is a parable that always perplexed me, or at least, the accepted interpretations of the parable did, especially the ending: “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” I love the study of the Bible. It fascinates me and I’ve found that over time, some things remain a mystery and some things become more clear. Randy’s words regarding this parable resonated with me.

Randy’s argument was that the nobleman in the parable is not Christ and the message is not that those who tarry faithfully with a little or a lot will be rewarded accordingly. In fact, it’s all quite upside down, like so many things are when Christ enters the picture. The nobleman upholds the widely accepted gospel of reciprocal good: look after what God gives you and he will reward you. Work hard in your career and you will be successful. Be a good husband and you will have a good marriage. It is so easy, in this day and age where we make our individual selves our central focus, and we have so much control over what we do, for this to be reinforced over and over again. Frankly, it dulls our senses, as Christians, to what is actually true. When we get what we deserve, good or bad, Grace becomes obsolete.

All three servants send word that they will not accept the corrupt noblemen as their king. After their proclamation, two of the servants decide that what’s best, now that they’ve stood up against evil, is to move on and do as they were told. The third servant wraps the unclean money in a cloth, lest he become unclean himself, and he buries it. He wants nothing to do with this king’s economy. Despite their vocal rejection of their king, the two servants are rewarded because, in the end, they were obedient and went along with the instructions left to them. The third servant is killed however. How dare he make a farce of the king by disobeying him and

burying the unclean treasure. Indeed, the idiot that has nothing will lose everything anyway...in fact, it's probably what he deserves.

Jesus finishes this story and prepares himself for the farce that lies before him: a triumphant king entering into Jerusalem. But not on a horse, as any of the kings before him would have done. No, he, a grown man, rides a foal. It must have been a ridiculous scene. As he rides, there is a convergence of people: his followers who have come with him, the crowds who have come out to greet him, and the religious elite. It's no surprise that the Pharisees, like the nobleman, were outraged. They were being mocked by a loser of an imposter king riding on a donkey. And yet there were all the adoring crowds, praising and singing, throwing down their jackets and grabbing palm leaves so that their king's stead dare not even touch the ground.

What does Jesus do? He weeps over it all.

He is so disheartened by the entire scene. He knows what is to come; not just within the next week but within the next millenia. There before him are the religious leaders; those who are steeped in the Torah, devout followers of his father, and yet they are completely blinded by their certainty that Jesus can't possibly be the promised Messiah. They are so adamant as to who they need in a saviour, what he should look like, and how he should behave, that they can't recognize who it is that comes before them. Next are the fickle crowds. They, like the two servants, might recognize for a while, what is indeed true and good. They get caught up in the excitement of the moment, proclaiming their adoration of Jesus. But none of it will stick; the status quo will win out, the feathers will return to their unruffled state, the real discomfort will be avoided. They will be easily convinced, within a few days, by another argument that makes more sense to them. And finally, there are his followers. Here is a motley crew of folks who have been moved enough by the glimpses of the Messiah to believe in him and follow him. How redeeming it must have been for them that Jesus was finally getting his due! They love him deeply but ultimately they will abandon him too. When the cracks begin to appear in their storybook ending, they become terrified and flee.

No wonder he weeps. 33 years walking the earth, always pointing back to the Father, proclaiming the same message over and over again. Despite his ministry, his miracles, warning them, giving them ample opportunity to believe, they really have no idea who they believe in. Rather than trust in the one who loves them and who has come to save them, they will continue to look elsewhere, for someone better, more suitable, more fitting. In the end, their blindness will bring about their own demise. He wept indeed.

REMINDER

We are all looking for a saviour, just like the religious elite, just like the animated crowds, just like his followers. We all have our reasons. But we will need to abandon who we think that Saviour should be, for the one who really is. We will have to relinquish control over our lives and trust in the goodness of a God who was willing to send his own son to die. The whole thing reeks of discomfort and chaos by our estimation. But he will not abandon his desire to bring us fully to life; he remains always, in loving pursuit of us.

PRAYER

God, I see myself in each of the players in this story. I cling to what I want, to what I think I need. I'm certain of how the story should turn out; certain of what is best for me and my family. But you see it all, God. You see every last detail from beginning to end. Help me to slowly release my grip on all that I am holding on to, and give it all, including myself, to you.