

Matthew 21

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately.^[a]" ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd^[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹² Then Jesus entered the temple^[c] and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer';
but you are making it a den of robbers."

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard^[d] the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry ¹⁶ and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise for yourself?'"

¹⁷ He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

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Matthew 21:1-17

“Tell Me About God, I’m Starting to Forget”

Kerra Becker English

Have you not heard, “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies, you have prepared praise for yourself?” Jesus is quoting Psalm 8 here. The Psalm begins, “O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes to silence the enemy and the avenger.” Then the Psalm continues with its most famous phrase, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”

There is quite a powerful role ascribed to babies here. They are the ones who praise God most purely. We get that. The laughter of infants is pure joy. The tears of a baby will melt your heart. But then it says, that they are the ones who will silence the enemy and the avenger. Well, I would say that seems rather strange to us. Babies being the stronghold against our foes? What is the Psalmist trying to say here, and how is Jesus overhearing the hosannas of children and using it effectively against the anger of the chief priests and scribes? Their joyous shouts of “Hosanna to the Son of David” become the undoing of those who held religious power and authority. Apparently, it ruffled their feathers to have children celebrating Jesus. No one ever celebrated *their* role in the temple! Were they jealous of his power? Did they come unglued by his triumphant parade into Jerusalem? Were they more infuriated that he disrupted their cash stream or cured the sick and lame who depended on the church? Or did Jesus hit a nerve when he pointed out that the kids liked him best?

Clearly, Jesus' return to Jerusalem causes a ruckus. But when the temple authorities approached him to justify his actions, his only defense seems to be, "Ask the children. Listen to the babies. They will tell you who I am."

It reminded me of a story I first heard in my preaching class years ago when I was in seminary. One of the better storytellers in our group got up to tell the story about his cousin who just had her second child. When she and her husband brought the baby home from the hospital, their three-year-old became quite curious about the baby. He started asking if he could spend time alone with his new sister. At first, they brushed it off. It seemed to be a weird request and they were worried for their new baby's safety. But their son was insistent. I want time ALONE with my sister. When they saw that their son would not be dissuaded, they set up every safety precaution they could. They found a soft spot on the nursery floor where he could hold her. They put pillows everywhere. They set up the baby monitor to keep an ear on what was going on. After they left, and closed the door, they waited, and wondered what their son would do. They could hear him cuddling her and then waiting for it to get quiet. And then after a few minutes of what only could have been him studying his little sister, the parents heard him ask of her, "Tell me about God, I'm starting to forget."

Tell me about God, I'm starting to forget. The "newness" of babies makes it seem like they would know what God is all about. Their journey to life is both dangerous and miraculous, and our deep desire to protect them and keep them safe is how the cycle of life perpetuates itself. Did the three-year-old know something we don't know? When do we start forgetting what God is all about? When do we stop shouting Hosanna to the Son of David? When do we forget enough that we must re-learn and return to the stories ourselves?

It's an interesting illustration – this story about the baby being the one to help us remember who God is – one that I found out a few years later probably wasn't about my classmate's cousin. It came from the book, "Chicken Soup for the Soul." This story, though it may be in part true, in the voice of a good storyteller, may simply be used to evoke emotion in the listener. If you can get a little bit wistful in the telling – it almost doesn't matter what you hope to have it mean, it just draws out the "aww" factor.

But Jesus isn't just pulling on our heart strings here when he talks about the power present in these young lives. He is looking to them as the ones who will change the world. Out of their mouths – truth. Out of their lives – a stronghold for God. Out of their perseverance – a stop to our enemies and avengers.

Children are far more than props for a good story. In the Presbyterian tradition, we practice the baptism of infants, not because they know God so well themselves, but because they help us who are adults know God better. In welcoming children into the life of the church, we humbly acknowledge that it isn't our great faith, or wealth of knowledge, or acts of righteousness that earn us favor with God. We at birth, maybe even before birth, according to other Old Testament texts, already have favor with God. God loves us wholly and completely because we belong to this created world, this world God so loves.

It is this radical dependence on God's grace that Jesus is talking about when he tells us that we must become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven. He knows that it is their vulnerability to life that sets them apart – and that the more we become afraid and thicken our shell to the world – the more distant we will grow from God. The religious leaders were scared, scared of what Jesus coming back to Jerusalem might mean. They had run him off once. This time, he even knew that he was returning to the center of the turmoil to die. He entered Jerusalem, with the shadow of death

hanging over his head, and the children sang songs about him. The babies were proclaiming God's favor, and for generation after generation to come, those children who recognize holiness proclaim that the enemies of God have no power and the perpetrators of evil acts cannot overcome justice in the long term.

It is both reassuring and terrifying to put this kind of trust in children – but it's what we always do. The next generation arrives, and we do our part to listen to them, to hear about their dreams, help them sing, and pray for them to survive with all the right skills to live in joy and peace. And sadly, we also bear witness to way too many lost children in our world – the children of Syria, the girls who end up being trafficked for prostitution, the brown and black skinned children who we call equal but have a long history of treating as lesser than. It is our job as the church to notice that all these children are our own. They belong to us, because they belong to God. In God's world, there is no such thing as my children, and your children, they are ALL OUR children – again a lesson that baptizing babies reminds us we can learn.

So today, as Jesus comes into the midst of the chaos – of Jerusalem and of our own brokenness – we look to the children to sing Hosannas, to offer praise, to give us hope to face our enemies because we care about what kind of world they will inherit. Today, Natalie and Jackie, you bring your babies to be presented to God in this community as a reminder that faith is transmitted, not only through books and lessons, but through people and relationships, and it is developed from generation to generation. You may want to ask your children from time to time to tell you about God – in case you start to forget. They may not have all the language of the church, but they will speak to you in the language of love, God's native tongue. And as they grow, you will teach them about your faith, and the faith you have inherited from your father and mother. And you can count

on the loving people here to be ready to celebrate their milestones and be a support to you in both the wonder and the weariness of parenting. We are in this life together.

But even for those of us who aren't actively parenting or grandparenting, who see little of young people over the course of a typical day, there is an importance to caring about the generations who follow us – just as we have cared for the generations who have gone before us. It matters that we pay taxes and give generously to support public schools. It matters that we give art supplies to the children whose parents are in the Circles program. It matters that we support a food pantry, and give money from our Pentecost offering to send kids to the YMCA over the summer who have nowhere else to go when school is out. It heals not only those individual children, but it begins to show the kind of healing that carries forward into subsequent generations as well.

Yes, it is the children who sing Hosannas at Jesus' arrival. They see the hope that we so desperately want to cling to ourselves. They let us imagine a future in which the love of God is known and shown to all people. Hosanna to the Son of David! Tell us about God – just in case we might forget. Amen.