

Today our gospel text is recorded in Mark. The first verse of the gospel tells us what this whole narrative is about, “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The story is told in such a way as to get you, the reader, to enter into the tension of the movement of the kingdom. What will you do with the news of the crucified and risen One?

I am struck in my reading of Mark this time around by Jesus observant stances in the story. It is as if he is looking at the world around him with eyes that are seeing things to which others are blind. He enters Jerusalem riding a colt in a parade in which he is the focus, yet the truth of who he is remains hidden. Upon his entry he was greeted by the expectant shouts and prayers of the crowds as they hailed him “blessed,” “as one who comes in the name of the Lord,” and as one who is leading God’s kingdom movement.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem that day, he could see and feel the response of the crowd. The crowds in return looked on Jesus with hope and expectation, although not knowing really who Jesus was or where Jesus was going. They don’t quite see how God in Jesus was transforming the world. Instead, they confirm in their minds that Jesus was looking like the candidate in their mind who would come to save them from their political struggles.

SLIDE – VIEW FROM BALCONY

Jesus has a different view of what will be the saving work. Seeing as Jesus sees will lead us to hope. Paying attention to what Jesus pays attention to is a path with potential. Jesus is observant as he moves in and out of Jerusalem, going between Bethany and the Temple in the story. One day in the temple he sat down to watch the crowd as they came to put their pilgrimage offerings in the treasury. He saws that the temple leaders were living off the poor and helpless. Ironically, the woman who put in her whole life foreshadows his own giving of his whole self as a ransom for many.

Then Jesus exited the temple and went across the way to the Mount of Olives, fixing his gaze on the temple precincts. He predicted that the great temple made of stones would be destroyed. His disciples, hearing another word they cannot comprehend, ask when this might be. All that Jesus can tell them is that a time of disorder and distress will soon take place hastened by the newness of a movement.

Now outside the temple, he reflects on his journey which he has been deliberately disclosing all along to his closest followers. He has removed himself from the push and pull of the present activity. He has a different view. One could say he is looking on in Jerusalem as if from the balcony.

I remember the first time I secured tickets to the Children’s Theatre Company in Minneapolis for our family. The timing seemed right, our older boy had just read *The BFG* by Roald Dahl and the theatre had the show. The only problem in my mind was our younger boy who was very active. Would he be able to attend to the show? The only tickets we could get were in the balcony. I thought that was good as there would be fewer people to disturb if we needed to move around. But I should not have worried. It was the perfect vantage point when the 25 foot puppet arose. And the words and the story were perfect for our younger son who was fascinated by language.

The BFG, a giant, had been explaining how giants roam the land at night. When human beans see the giants, the giants snatch them up, take them away and eat them. That is what the Bonecruncher, the

Childchewer and the Fleshlumpeater did. When Sophie, the girl the BFG had taken asked him what kind of human beings he ate, this is what he said.

“Me! Me gobbling up human beans! This I never! The others, yes! All the others is gobbling them up every night, but not me! I is a freaky Giant! I is a nice and jumbly Giant! I is the only nice and jumbly Giant in Giant Country! I is the Big Friendly Giant! I is the BFG!”

The story itself was written to lead our imaginations into a place where we could consider a different world where at least one Giant was not cannybully.

In the gospel, it is not just that Jesus is viewing things from a different physical vantage point, all that he is and all that he says is from this other view.

The disciples see things the way they have always seen things. They are dazzled by the architectural beauty of the temple. Historians report stones forty feet long. It was larger than the Roman Forum and the Athenian Acropolis. Herod the Great covered it with gold. They like the crowds tended to believe in armies and fortresses. This surely was the most unshakeable symbol of God’s presence one could imagine.

SLIDE – DIRECTIONAL SIGN

Jesus attempts to correct their vision. “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” The temple has not been serving God’s purposes. Something new is about to be known. There is good news which is about to be uncovered. Yet it does not come apart from struggle. “Beware!” Jesus tells his disciples. You will be challenged and questioned. You need to be prepared for what is coming.

It can easily happen that all of our sacred places and our favorite endeavors could be headed in a direction other than life. This happens as we put our trust in things other than God. This happens when we busy ourselves with things which have little redemptive value.

Jesus filled the gospel of Mark with warnings and promise. The parable of the Sower promises that there will be a failure and disappointment—but a harvest that will make the enterprise worthwhile. Now Jesus warns the disciples of terrible difficulties, suffering, challenges and tribulation await them. But then Jesus defines it with a bit of hope. “This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.” Suffering and pain accompany the process of birth but then new birth and new life. Jesus promised that “all will see” the return of the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. You could say the cross and resurrection brought new things into view.

SLIDE - CROSSES

But God, who mercifully raised the crucified Jesus from the dead, has elected otherwise! Our standing before God is now as written in Mark 12:10-11, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes.” In Christ, God has done what we could not do for ourselves: God has taken the finality out of death, so that we can be free to trust in God despite the looming worries of the day. The very one whom we crucified, it turns out, still loves us! We did our worst to God, yet God gave his best to us. In Christ, God gives us a promise of life that is beyond death. When we are free to trust in God, the ability to see can be opened up.

What we need is vision beyond what we normally or generally consider. We will need to press ourselves into ways that challenge our old viewpoints.

An experiment was done with Joshua Bell, the renowned violinist. He was asked to perform on the Metro subway station in Washington, D.C. in casual clothes. He played brilliantly on his Stradivarius violin. A hidden camera caught people's reactions. Only seven people out of more than a thousand stopped to listen. After 45 minutes in the Metro station his donations totaled \$32.17. People were regularly paying hundreds of dollars to hear him in concert. How easy it is to miss what is before us in plain view.

SLIDE – GROUP HUG

This week in the Minneapolis Star Tribune they wrote yet another feature on the decline of the church describing how those who still believe in God no longer find the church worthy of their time. One of the largest groups not participating are the millennials. Studies cite how their whole view of the world is different from previous generations. Divorce and unemployment are common realities. They might not have a sense of place being secure. They have grown up in a disposable society.

Some see hope in this generation, though. They can be seen as good at asking questions, dealing with doubts and more ready to adapt when challenged.

If what we need is a vision beyond what we normally consider, there are avenues available. One pastor is experimenting with having guided conversations with those who have stepped away from regular participation in worship and church. This includes young adults but can also include people of any age.

As we consider seeing things from a new vantage point we can be assured by the promise at the resurrection in the gospel of Mark. Jesus has joined the different view with a promise, that he goes ahead of us.