

April 20, 2014

I Will Raise It Up

Mark 11:1 – 11

John 2:19 – 21

I know that some of you are looking at the passage we just read in Mark and saying to yourselves, 'This is a Palm Sunday text. This guy is a week behind here. This is Easter Sunday – not Palm Sunday! This doesn't say anything about resurrection' Well, don't get too excited about that – I do know what day it is. And this text does talk about the resurrection but not in the way you think. What we have here is a foreshadowing of things to come, and I believe this passage speaks directly to the meaning of the resurrection in three ways – **redemption, restoration, replacement**. That is, the resurrection means three things – the redemption of all history, the restoration of all creation, the replacement of all temples.

First of all, the resurrection means **the redemption of all history**. And more to the point – the redemption of all **our** history. Look here at how Jesus comes into Jerusalem. *And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and He sat on it.* Mark 11:7 Jesus had been telling His disciples all along that one day He was going to end up in Jerusalem. The Messiah was going to reveal Himself at last. They sort of missed the part about the fact that He also told them He was going to suffer and die. They missed the part about the Messiah winning through weakness, not strength. Their theology expected a messiah – but a conquering messiah – riding in on a white steed to right all wrongs and drive the Romans out of their land. And now here it is. And you can almost see the disciples looking at one another going, 'Alright! This is how we're gonna roll!'

And Jesus gives them specific instructions about His ride – 'Go into that village and you'll see an unbroken colt tied up there. Untie it and bring it to me.' Mark doesn't tell us, but Matthew tells us that this colt wasn't a horse but the foal of an ass – a donkey – and not even a grown-up donkey. And then he says *'This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass.'"* This was supposed to be His triumphal entry – the King is coming! And here He comes riding in on an ass. Who does that? Who rides in on a donkey? That's the comic relief. That's not the main attraction! This is how the clowns ride in – surely not the King! **This** is what they thought. **This** is what they got.

So what was Jesus saying by riding in on a donkey? He was saying, 'I am going to bring the kingdom, I will be victorious, but the vehicle for My victory is My suffering and My weakness and My death.' Now this is the first theme of the resurrection. The first thing the resurrection means is that the resurrection doesn't take you away from weakness and suffering; the resurrection subsumes the suffering and weakness. The resurrection doesn't wipe out the weakness and suffering and humiliation – it enfolds it and glorifies it. It takes your weakness and suffering and brings it into the great thing that God is doing in your life.

Look at Jesus. The writer of Hebrews tells us, *'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.'* *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* Hebrews 4:15-16 That means that the resurrection does not deal with evil and suffering like a time machine. You get in a time machine to go back into the past to change things so it will be as if it never happened. Jesus doesn't hit rewind and go back into the past to wipe out stuff to make it like it never happened. But rather, because of His shame and humiliation and suffering and death, He is infinitely more to us than He would have been otherwise.

When Jesus shows up after His resurrection, and shows Himself to His disciples in His resurrected body, have you ever been struck by the fact that His wounds are still there? His back is still lacerated from the whip; His hands still have nail holes through them; His head and face still bear the marks of the thorns; His feet are still pierced; His side still has the hole made by the spear. *'Touch the holes in My hands and put your hand in the wound in My side'* He tells Thomas, *'And believe.'* We tend to think that Jesus shows up to erase all the pain and suffering and wounds in our lives. But that's not what happens.

Jesus doesn't remove the scars. His resurrected body still bears the ravages of the whip and the cross and the spear. He doesn't wave a magic wand and take us back in time to unmake it all. Instead Jesus takes the tragedy and makes it a triumph. He takes the wounds and the suffering and the humiliation and makes them serve His purposes. He takes the dirge and lament of the trouble and trials of life and turns them into songs of praise and thanksgiving. He takes all the dark things that leave scars and weaves them into a beautiful tapestry of light that serves to reflect and shine forth His glory and grace. Because the wounds and weakness and suffering of Christ have been taken up into the greater glory of God, He can do the same with ours. **He doesn't erase the wounds – He beautifies them.**

Howard Hendricks tells of visiting a leprosy center in India. The morning he arrived, the residents were gathered for a praise service. One of the women with leprosy hobbled to the platform. Hendricks said that even though she was partially blind and badly disfigured, she was one of the most beautiful women he'd ever seen. Raising both of her nearly fingerless hands toward Heaven, she said in a clear voice, **"I want to praise God that I am a leper because it was through my leprosy that I came to know Jesus Christ as my Savior. And I would rather be a leper who knows Christ than be completely whole and a stranger to His grace."**

We all have wounds and scars. We all bear, in differing measures, the consequences of our own stupidity or the deliberate hurt by others or the wounds and scars of the world. And we're all, in different ways, looking for healing. Looking for ways to erase the hurt and the scars and the suffering. But the resurrection tells us that something better than just erasing the past is possible. The resurrection is where God says, 'Every evil act, every whip cut and nail hole and spear thrust that has wounded you and scarred you and shamed you, will be made into something that not only glorifies My goodness and greatness, but serves to make you into something beautiful and shining'.

Does God in the end right every wrong, settle every account, wipe away every tear? Absolutely! Everything about your life that is tragic and sad and unbearable will one day be turned to ultimate joy and gladness. And yet it will be more joyful and more triumphant and more glad for once having been tragic. All your sad history will be taken up into the greatness of what God is making you. We're going to be singing a hymn before we take communion this morning and one of the lines in that hymn says, **'Rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified'**. The resurrection doesn't get rid of your tragic history, it brings it into God and in His glory it is all made beautiful. The resurrection doesn't mean that we won't suffer, that we won't have tears in this life. What it means is that when we trust in the resurrected Christ, all our trials will be turned into triumph. At some level we are all looking for redemption. Redemption from a painful past; redemption from a bad childhood; redemption from bad choices or broken relationships; redemption from our history. **The resurrection means the redemption of all your history.**

Secondly, the resurrection means the **restoration of all creation**. *And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"* Mark 11:8-10 Why were they spreading their coats on the road and waving palm branches and shouting 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming of our father David!?' They were saying, **'We think you are the Messiah, the one who will restore the kingdom of our father, king David.'** In other words, when the real King returns, the King of Kings, He's going to make everything right; He's going to restore everything; there's going to be a golden age that looks like the high point of Israel under king David, but infinitely greater.

Everything's going to be healed. Not just spiritually, or politically or culturally, but physically too. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them, and He didn't do that poorly. Everything was perfect – Adam and Eve and the animals and plants and the stars and the moons – everything on the earth and everything in the heavens – everything was perfect. But sin came in and ruined the perfection. And from that comes all the suffering and pain and sadness and death in the world today. But God is not sitting in heaven wringing His hands over the ruination of creation. He is drawing out something better, something more glorious, something far more beautiful than if things had not gone wrong.

God's plan was to redeem and then renew and restore what sin had attempted to destroy, so that His glory and His greatness would shine all the brighter. And the Bible tells us that everything will be restored when Jesus returns. *'that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago.'* Acts 3:20-21 And He speaks about it in the Psalms: *Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for He comes, for He comes to judge the earth.* Psalm 96:11-13 And He tells about it in the prophets: Isaiah says, *"For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.* Isaiah 55:12 Trees are going to sing and clap their hands, the mountains and hills will sing, you will be led forth with joy! Creation restored!

Which means that not only you and I and everyone **who has trusted Christ** for salvation will be healed, but nature will be healed too! All of creation. Notice that Jesus picks this little donkey that has never been ridden. And that may not jump out at those of us who have no experience with donkeys or horses. But if any of you have, you know that the first thing an animal that has never been ridden tries to do is get rid of the rider. A horse or a donkey first need to be broken. You don't just jump up on an unbroken animal and they turn to you and say, 'Which way?' And that makes this scene amazing. Jesus gets on an animal that has never been ridden and the little donkey immediately knows who it is that is riding and gets with the program. It's the King!

And the Bible tells us that when the real King returns: *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.* Isaiah 11:6-9 Jesus is showing Himself to be the Lord of all creation. He calmed the stormy sea with a word – He healed every disease He ever encountered – He was master of every demon who opposed Him. This little donkey immediately knew who was onboard.

What this is, waving the palm branches and riding on an unbroken donkey is a picture of the restoration of the physical creation. The trees are gonna clap their hands and sing, and the lion will lie down with the lamb and the donkey will recognize its master. The resurrection is not just about cleansing the soul and redeeming your history; it is the deepest affirmation that God cares about the material world. God cares about the body. God loves His creation. Look, the Son of God gets a body, and then He dies, not just to save our souls, but to resurrect and renew our body. That means that God cares about the poor; God cares about injustice in the world; He cares about suffering and hunger and pain and want. He's against injustice; He's against sickness; He's against death. He cares about the body. Because He loves His creation. And that means He cares about you. Not just your soul – but your entire being. And one day He's going to completely restore and renew that body of yours. Full salvation. ***Sin has damaged His creation, but God is going to restore all things.***

Finally, the resurrection means **the replacement of all temples**. Or to put it another way, the replacement of all religion. And here I am narrowly defining what I mean by religion. Religion itself is not a bad word. In fact the apostle James defines what true religion really is in the first chapter of his letter. What I mean by religion here is the mere ritual observance of faith that links self-effort to salvation. That is, **a faith that attempts to pull itself up by its own bootstraps**. Look at the text here: *And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.* Mark 11:11 Jesus enters Jerusalem on a wave of adoration, gets off the donkey and goes to the temple, the very center of what was the worship of God in His day, and then He leaves.

But He comes back the next day, makes a whip and starts driving everybody out. And when the Jews asked Him what gave Him the right to do that, and what sign would He give that He had the authority to do it, Jesus told them: *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking about the temple of His body.* John 2:19-21

Jesus' death and resurrection is supremely about the temple and it is this statement, which comes up in His trial, that gets Him killed. The Jews were incredibly offended because Jesus said He was going to destroy the temple. **The temple represented their religion.** And people get upset when you mess with their religion. And the Jews were not unique in this. Every culture has its religion; and every religion has its temples. And the image of the temple speaks to two things. The first is that **there is a God** – there is a divine being to which we are accountable. And the second thing is that you can't just walk up to God and chew the fat. There is a chasm between us and Him – there's a gap that must be bridged. **There needs to be a mediator** – a go-between because there is a real separation between us.

C. S. Lewis put it like this: *'...our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. The sense that in this universe we are estranged, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and that reality. This is the inconsolable secret of every soul. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honor beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache.'*

The temple means that we know there's something out there and we know that there's something keeping us away, and we know we need something to bridge the gap. And we try. We try to bridge the gap with stuff that won't work. There is this tragic scene in Genesis where Adam and Eve have sinned and they suddenly realize they are exposed – they're naked – and they're ashamed of their nakedness. And they hear God coming and they try to cover up with leaves. I don't know what they were thinking. **'Maybe He won't notice we're wearing fig leaves'**. Their sin had separated them from God and they were trying to bridge the gap with fig leaves. The people of Jesus' day were trying to bridge that gap with religious fig leaves – doing stuff. Being good, trying not to sin too much, observing all the feasts and the rituals, going to temple religiously, giving money to the poor; trying to bridge the chasm that yawned between them and the divine.

Historically we know that by this time, the temple that represented God's presence on earth, was an empty shell. At one time it held the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy seat where God met with man; and the glory of God filled the temple. But through their disobedience and sin, the Ark had been lost and the glory had departed, and Jesus rebuked the religious Pharisees who were still acting as if God were there, as white-washed tombs full of dead mens bones. In other words, they had a temple but they didn't have God – **they had religion but no reality**. The temple was still there, the sacrifices were still going on, tithes were being paid, prayers were offered – but they were trying to reach God on their own terms. They were wearing fig leaves.

And Jesus comes and says, 'Tear down this temple – it's an empty shell – I'll replace all the means you are using to get to God – I'll give you a new temple – My body – because I'm the God you're trying to reach.' But He's not just saying, **'I'm the God you are seeking'**. By saying He's the temple He's also saying **'I'm the bridge across the chasm that connects you to God and heals that inconsolable ache.'** The temple and the sacrifices and the rituals were not ends in themselves, they were meant to point to the perfect temple, the perfect sacrifice – Jesus. Religion tells you that you must provide the bridge, you must provide the priest, you must provide the sacrifice, you must do the work. But the gospel is that God Himself provides the bridge – He provides the sacrifice – He provides the priestly mediator – He does the work.

Religion tells us that we have to do something to be accepted. There is some sacrifice I have to make, some penance I have to do, some good work that Jesus will see me do and take me in. I can't tell you how many times I have talked with people about Christ and they have said something like, 'I've got to clean up my life before I can come to Christ. I'm such a mess'. Listen, if you could clean it up you wouldn't be such a mess in the first place. Your life will never be whole through good intentions or self-effort – only by substitution – you need someone to take your place. **Jesus Christ is the one who lived the life you should have lived and died the death you should have died and because of Him, you can go right in.** What the resurrection means is that Jesus replaces all our temples – all our religious efforts at self-salvation. He replaces all other mediators. What Jesus is saying is that **'Through Me, you can come right into the presence of God'**. The resurrection means genuine relationship, real intimacy with a God from whom we feel estranged and cut off, through Jesus Christ who gave His life for ours.

Jesus told the Jews, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" When we believe in the finished work of Christ He raises everything in our lives up to God. The resurrection of Jesus means **the redemption of all history – the restoration of all creation – the replacement of all temples**. I know that some of you have come broken this morning – broken by relationships, by circumstances and events. You need to know that Jesus wants to redeem your brokenness and make you whole again. Some of you feel so messed up that you can't possibly be straightened out – you need to know that Jesus came to redeem all the ragged threads of your mess and weave them into a banner of His grace. Some of you just feel like failures – you need to know that the resurrection of Jesus has the power to turn all your failures into triumph.

And there are some of you saying, 'I don't think I'm that bad – I don't feel too messed up or broken, and I really don't think I'm a failure.' And maybe you're doing pretty good – you're even fairly religious – or at least fairly moral. But you're trying to reach God on your own terms, trying to be your own mediator – and the truth is you have a sneaking suspicion that maybe you are more of a mess than you let on. You're wearing fig leaves and they're not working very well. You need to know this morning that there is only one way to God and that is through His Son, who came to expose and destroy and replace all our fig leaves. For the broken and the messed up, for the failures and for those who think they're doing pretty well – we all have one common need – a perfect replacement for all our attempts to reach God that are utterly failing.

This morning the message you need to take away is that Jesus Christ, Son of God, came from the Father to live the life you should have lived, to die the death you should have died to open the way back to God, through His own body, to redeem all your history, and usher in the restoration of all creation. 2,000 years ago, Jesus went to the cross and died for the sins of the world – yours and mine – and rose again on the third day so that this morning you could receive the free gift of salvation in Him.

In a moment we will invite you to receive communion at the Lord's Table, and communion is something that points to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is a reminder, not only of the pain and suffering and sacrifice He went through on the cross for our sakes – bearing our sins in His body, absorbing the wrath of God so we don't have to, mediating for us with God – but it is a glorious reminder of His triumph over sin and death and hell in resurrection. It tells us that all our history can be redeemed – all of God's creation will one day be restored – and we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, the real temple. If you have trusted Christ for salvation, this table is for you. Join the family of God as we remember Jesus. If you haven't trusted Christ for salvation, then this is not for you. Take this time to mediate and think on what you've heard – let it soak into your soul – and let the word of God ignite faith in your heart to believe.

Our gracious God and heavenly Father,

We thank You this morning for sending Your Son to die for our sins on the cross. We rejoice that You accepted His sacrifice on our behalf by raising Him from the dead. Christ is risen and our souls sing for joy! All our history redeemed, the promise of creation restored and the way back to God opened through Jesus. Thank You that You do not leave us feeling fine in our sin and rebellion but in Your mercy you make us feel lost enough to be led to life. Forgive us O Lord, for trying to bridge the gap ourselves. Forgive us for not loving You and counting You more precious than life. Thank You for the promise of mercy and grace for those who repent. Show us the infinite and all satisfying glory of the risen Christ and give us hearts that love You supremely. Deliver us from the chains of slavery to sin into the glorious freedom of the Son of Your love, we pray in the powerful and effective name of the risen Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.