

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee."

- Zechariah ix,9

Zechariah ix

Matthew xxi,1-14

Psalm 146

New Book of Worship, Psalm 146, p.88

These words of the prophet Zechariah were literally fulfilled when the Lord entered Jerusalem at the beginning of His last week upon earth. Palm Sunday was first celebrated in the early history of the Christian Church, and became increasingly popular, being celebrated by processions intended to dramatize the triumphal entry of the Lord into Jerusalem.

Because of the part that children played in praising the Lord with songs at His entry and in the temple, as recorded in the Gospels, Palm Sunday has come to be regarded as a specially fitting time for the introduction of children into the Church.

Certainly it is one of the duties of the Church to see that its children and young people are instructed in the teachings of the Church. For these teachings were revealed by the Lord that men and women might know them and direct their thoughts and their life according to them. The teachings of the Church of the New Jerusalem are the fundamental principles of human thought and life, without which it is impossible for anyone to live a truly sane and rational life. The first essential of all sound thought is a true idea of God. It may be a very simple idea, but it must be true; otherwise the basic falsity will infect all the lower ideas and planes of thought. Likewise there should be a true idea of the Word of God, a recognition of the fact that it is holy, and that it is the Divine wisdom for angels and men. And children should be taught the necessity of obedience to their Heavenly Father, and that all people should obey Him throughout eternity.

These things are fundamental. They are not something that may, if we wish, be added to our education; they are the essential to all education if it is to fulfill its real purpose, which is the formation and perfection of our minds and souls.

As we grow up, we shall demand more detailed knowledge of God, His Word, and the meaning of life for the perfection of our minds. And such knowledge is essential to the understanding of all branches of knowledge. Truth, of whatever degree, does not conflict with truths concerning the Lord and spiritual things, but should serve to strengthen and confirm the higher truths.

The words of our text, "Rejoice greatly... behold, thy King cometh unto thee," were addressed to the people of Jerusalem, where the great temple was to which all were commanded to come at stated times for worship. In a great city are people of every age and occupation, of all kinds of thought and ways of life, many different kinds of people of every social status. The Lord came to give the gift of Himself to every human soul. The words of our text are addressed to all. The text might be translated "Behold, thou, thy King cometh unto thee." By His life upon the earth, by His victory over all sin and evil, He gave to all men and women the freedom which enables them to choose the way of life.

Who were these people, these multitudes who went before and followed after the Lord at His entry into Jerusalem? They were not the scribes and Pharisees; they were just the common people of the city and countryside. Some were the Lord's disciples. Others were those who had heard His teaching and wondered. For some He had healed their sick, their blind, their dumb, their halt, their afflicted. They knew Him for what He said or did, and perhaps to some little degree they surmised who He was.

More than nineteen hundred years have passed since the historic incident of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, and for more than nineteen centuries this incident has been commemorated in some way or other by Christian people in many lands. But it is not sufficient merely to recognize the historic fact, to know that He came upon earth at a certain time, and that He came to the whole world. He must come to us individually. For that is the purpose of His coming; namely, that He may reach each one of us and bring us into the way that leads to heaven. He entered Jerusalem as King to teach us that He wishes to enter our hearts as King. The prophecy reads, "Thy King cometh unto thee." We should not say, "This has no meaning for me. I am too clever to need any help. I know my way about the world quite well without the King of Kings. I am brainy enough to do without Him," or, in other words, without religion. The Lord went to Jerusalem and entered the temple because the temple symbolizes the dwelling place of the Lord. He does not dwell in "houses made with hands" but in the humble and contrite heart. Applying this thought to ourselves, the temple is the Divine truth in which the Lord dwells, and by which He is revealed to us. By this truth He overcame the hells and wrought the redemption of mankind. It is in the truth of the Word that the Lord dwells, and by this truth He makes Himself known. He comes to us when the truths of the Word are learned, understood, and lived. They are His dwelling place in us. Take any statement of the Word, study it, and you will find that it is a door leading to inexhaustible truths. Through it the Lord gives us life, and overcomes our enemies in the battle of life. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." The Lord alone is the builder of all that is good and true in the lives of men.

When we read this story of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, we think not only of the wonderful victory over those who opposed Him in His life on earth. We think of His entry into the church universal of the world to purify it and to save mankind. We think of His entry into the individual soul to reign there. We see in this story what He would like to do for each one of us: to enter into our lives and to cast out the things of self that do not worship Him, and that make the heart not a temple of God but a den of thieves.

When we read this story, we feel that the Lord is speaking a direct message to us now. Today neither money changers nor vendors of doves invade the Church literally; yet the spirit they represent still exists. Business, the cares of the world, pleasures

and social interests of various kinds threaten to draw us away and to destroy our devotion. "My house shall be called a house of prayer," the Lord said; but the soul is not a house of prayer if we have no time for worship.

There is a tendency to commercialize the church, as in the appeal to support the church because the church is good for the standing of the community. It is good business to support the church; property is safer, life is safer where there is a church. Such thoughts do not reflect the spirit of the Gospel. They do not reflect the mind of the Lord. He came to serve not for His own profit, but that others might profit. Service of others is indeed a fundamental principle of the Christian life, but we should not perform it merely because we see that is essential to the stability of commercial institutions. To go to church for political reasons, or because it is conventional or fashionable, to go to get in with certain people, or because we shall be seen of men and respected for so doing, because it may promise a means to popularity or position, power or influence, are not forms of worship acceptable to the Lord.

There is another form in which the money changers and vendors invade the temple. Sometimes we try to follow the Lord and things do not turn out as we expect. John the Baptist felt this way when from prison he asked the question, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" He had suffered so much, and things had not come out as he expected. Where was that Kingdom which he had been commissioned to declare at hand? The world was going on its accustomed way, and he was in prison. Are we ever tempted to ask such questions?

We are often tempted to look at life in terms of worldly success. We even try to read into the Lord's life and teachings the things we think ought to be there, rather than to find out and conform to those that are there. Men look upon the world and see that self-confidence, natural abilities, and so on bring success, and they seek to find these things in the Lord. Over the years there have been writers who have tried to picture the Lord as a good advertiser, a keen analyst of human nature, and even as a great athlete. Of such it can be said, "Verily, they have made me like unto themselves." They are not really following the Lord, but are seeking to force Him to be the kind of king they want. That also is making the temple of the soul a den of thieves.

If we want the Lord to dwell as King in the temple of our souls, we should examine our motives in the light of the Word of God and pray that they may be made pure and true. If we honestly do this, recognize our failings, and seek help, we shall come to know that even though we find that there are many places in our souls that need cleansing, the Lord can make them clean. For He through His Word shows us our weaknesses not to condemn us, but only that we may have life, and have it more abundantly. And if we will let Him, He will make our souls a temple in which His presence can be felt.

Amen