

“A Different Kind of King!” Palm Sunday April 5, 2009 Text: John 12:13

Palm Sunday. It's time for the children's sermon. As the kids come up front, so does the pastor. But what's that on his head? He's wearing a crown! A Burger King Crown! And it's up-side down, too! You can imagine the kids' questions! Had it been me, they'd probably think, "Well, Pastor Martens has finally lost it!" But this pastor is much younger than I am and much cooler. Senility is out of the question. So why is the pastor wearing a crown...upside down? The suspense doesn't last long. Soon enough the pastor tells them: "It's to remind us what kind of a king Jesus is. A very different kind of king!"

This morning as we hear the passion story, and in the week ahead as we reflect on Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, it's good for us all to remember what kind of king Jesus is. For this is not just a theoretical question. Nor is the answer just a matter of opinion. Our lives – here and hereafter – depend on what kind of king Jesus really is. And one thing's for sure: He's not the "normal" kind! In fact, His idea of kingship is pretty upside-down!

Jesus made this very clear as He entered Jerusalem the first Palm Sunday. Sure, the crowds greeted Him as if he were a "normal" king. They desperately wanted to cast Him in that role. *Be a military messiah, who will free us from the Romans! Be our political Savior, who'll fix everything and feed everyone!* "Hosanna! 'Save us,'" they shouted – meaning "save us" in the political sense. But Jesus didn't come to be that kind of king. He made that as clear as He could. Why, He even rode into town on a donkey, for heaven's sake! A symbol of peace and humility! No "normal" king would do that! Certainly not a military messiah. It was like wearing a crown upside-down! So, small wonder some who shouted "hosanna" on Palm Sunday later had second thoughts. Small wonder some even wound up shouting "Crucify Him!" on Good Friday! Jesus just wasn't their kind of king!

These days, too, people try to cast Jesus as the kind of king they want Him to be. There are political versions, of course – Jesus the rock-ribbed Republican, Jesus the dyed-in-the-wool Democrat, not to mention the "Green" Jesus, the "Radical" Jesus, even the "No Government" Jesus. And beyond politics...well, where do I even begin? There's the "Big-Buddy" Jesus, the "Subversive" Jesus, the "All-American" Jesus, the "Meek and Mild" Jesus, the "Really Cool" Jesus, the "Demythologized" Jesus, the "Anything Goes" Jesus, the "Don't-Even-Think-About-It" Jesus, even the "Coming Again and Boy Is He Mad!" Jesus.

Frankly, these days you can find most any kind of Jesus you want. And these days, a lot of people prefer to follow the kind of Jesus they want. That's just human nature, I suppose. We prefer to believe what we prefer to be true. But some people do it with a vengeance! Never mind those pesky Bible verses that don't fit their version of Jesus! Never mind Jesus' own refusal to fit anyone's mold but His own! They'll have their kind of Jesus or they won't have Jesus at

all! Sort of like the folks on the first Palm Sunday...or Good Friday, come to think of it. Like folks back then, they want a “normal” king – one who fits their expectations – certainly not one whose concept of kingship is upside-down!

But whether or not the crowd likes it, that’s the kind of king Jesus is. Upside-down! He’s the kind of king who’s born in a stable, not a palace; the kind who calls fishermen into His service, not the elite. He’s the kind of king who’s unimpressed with respectable people, yet seeks out the lowly; the kind who proclaims the highest morality, yet shows great mercy to sinners. He is the kind of king who has infinite wisdom, yet values the faith of a child; the kind who has almighty power, but won’t lift a finger to protect Himself. Indeed, He is the kind of king who could have countless crowns of gold, yet accepts a crown of thorns; could reign from a mighty throne, yet chooses to reign from a cross. And no matter what anyone may do to Him, His response is to forgive. Even those who don’t deserve it. Especially those who don’t deserve it. **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** Talk about upside-down! And that’s par for the course! Just when we think we’ve got Jesus figured out, He surprises us. Just when we think we’ve got Jesus under control, He shakes things up. Just when we’re comfortable with our “version” of Jesus, He turns things upside-down. Yes, that’s the kind of king Jesus is.

But honestly, whether or not the crowd likes it, would we want Him any other way? No! And would we expect Jesus to be any other way if He really is who we say He is? Would we expect the Son of God to perform whatever roles we cook up? Would we expect the King of Kings to kowtow to our will? And if He really is our Savior, would we expect Him to just fit in with what’s “normal”? I mean, think about it! Jesus came to save us from what’s “normal.” He came to save us from “normal” selfishness, “normal” arrogance, “normal” sins. He came to save us from “normal” vices, “normal” excuses, our “normal” way of operating! Or to be more accurate, He came to save us from what seems “normal” for what should be normal. Jesus saved us for a whole new way of life with godly values, godly virtues, godly priorities. So of course He won’t fit in with what seems “normal.” Of course His kind of kingship will seem upside-down...at least, at first. That’s to be expected...until we start to see things His way – right side up. And that’s what happens as we follow Jesus on His terms. Little by little, we realize: He’s not the one who’s got it upside-down; the world’s got it upside-down! And He’s come to give us a life that’s right side up! Yes, that’s what happens when we follow Jesus on His terms and let Him be a different kind of king.

That’s worth keeping in mind now as we follow Jesus in the reading of the Passion. What can we learn from Him, watching how He deals with people and situations? Let that be our model and guide. Forget the crowd. Then as now, the crowd never gets it right. They’re always a little too dim, too slow, too self-absorbed. Forget the crowd. And forget what seems “normal.” From scene to scene, the disciples are just a little too normal, and it doesn’t help them one little bit! No, focus on Jesus. Focus precisely on what is different about Jesus, what’s

upside-down: His patience with those He knows will abandon Him; His forgiveness towards those who hate Him without cause; His willingness to suffer for the greater good; His faithfulness to God – and us – come what may. Yes, focus on what we can learn from Jesus! For not only will we see what true love looks like – and a life that’s lived “right side up” – we’ll see what kind of a God we have, what kind of a Savior we can count on, what kind of a king rules this universe *and* our hearts: one whose faithfulness and mercy, one whose forgiveness and love, truly make Him a different kind of king! Amen.