



Matthew 21:14–17

14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant. 16 “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Justin Mofatt)

My passage today is Matthew 21:14–17. Jesus has entered Jerusalem on a donkey, and the whole city has been ‘stirred’. Jesus is not there to make friends, he upturns the tables of the money changes saying:

‘It is written, “My house will be called a house of prayer,” but you are making it “a den of robbers.”’

Then this happens. From verse 14, in our passage today:

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17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

This is the Emperor’s New Clothes, but with a positive spin on the king, rather than a negative one. You know, the Hans Christian Anderson story? Two trickster weavers persuade a vain Emperor to part with his money to buy a new suit; one that is (they claim) invisible to those who are unfit for their positions, or stupid, or incompetent. When the Emperor parades himself before his subjects in his new ‘clothes’, no

one dares to say that he appears naked (for obvious reasons) until a child cries out, and this is the key, 'But he isn't wearing anything at all!'

The kid sees the obvious. The kid says the obvious. The kid gets it. All the adults are blinded by pride (they don't want to be labelled incompetent), self-protection and fear. Sometimes kids get it, where adults don't.

The difference between the Hans Christian Anderson story and what happens in our passage today is that the Emperor isn't naked. The Emperor isn't vain. No. Jesus, the king, is Israel's rightful ruler, and he is worthy of praise. If I can put it this way, the king is not naked, he is clothed in righteousness. And it is the children in

our passage today who see it. They say: 'Hosanna to the Son of David.'

Regularly in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus points out that the children get what the adults miss. In fact, 'the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' So it's time to decide if we are planning on being a child before Jesus. Or an adult, beset with pride, self-protection and fear.

Way back in Matthew 11:25 we read:

At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.'

My friend, Nathan Tasker, a singer-songwriter based in Nashville, wrote a song about learning from children. The song is called 'The Wisdom of a Child', and in it he notes:

'And the irony is this: we teach the ones we should be learning from. And it's a shame because we miss, the comfort of knowing that we belong.'

The chorus is a beauty:

'If the wisdom of a child determines who I am, I'm not going to stand by and watch my faith grow old.'

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the 'faith', if I can use that word, of Israel had grown

old. Tired. Cynical.

Jesus has just entered Jerusalem and the message is unmistakable: Israel is receiving her rightful king. Within a week, the same city will crucify him. But, at least at this point, the adults praised God for his arrival, and they wanted the kingdom of God. They wanted an end to all the muck.

They cried out: 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' Not long after Jesus is upturning tables in the temple, but some of the kids are still singing the song that was being sung earlier. I've seen this sort of thing in my own children. We will be singing a song on the way to school, and the kids are still singing it on the way home. The catchy tune sticks in their mind. The kids are still singing the catchy tune: 'Hosanna to the

Son of David!’ and the Chief Priests and the Teachers of the Law were indignant. So they say:

“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

I asked a Moore College Old Testament lecturer once what these religious people were so upset about. Why did they want Jesus dead? And he simply said: ‘They wanted to keep their jobs.’ They were self-protective. They didn’t want God. They wanted the status quo.

“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

They shouldn’t be so happy! And Jesus quotes Psalm 8. He says: “Haven’t you

read...”

“From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your
praise’?”

The children get it, and the religious leaders don't. The weak get it, and the strong don't. Jesus didn't just upturn tables that day. But hearts and lives.

It's the same thing with the healing of the blind and the lame. When king David entered and captured the city of Jerusalem as his own in 2 Samuel 5:6–11, the blind and the lame are used to taunt David. So when David enters and captures Jerusalem, he excludes the blind and the lame from the Temple. Jesus, conversely, enters the city and, this time, this 'Son of Da-

vid' heals the blind and the lame. He heals them, rather than excludes them. Hosanna. It wasn't just the tables he overturned.

Think

Have you become too much of an adult? Meaning – have you gotten too cynical, too smart, too busy, too crusted on to old ways? So much so that you have become self-protective, and maybe even lost your capacity to love deeply.? Most of all, maybe you've lost your love for Jesus. Maybe that's true of you. Or maybe you are on the spectrum towards that sort of hard heart.

It's time to think. Is there something about children that I need to learn? It's time to sing the song that others have sung. And to relearn it in the evening. Jesus is my

king. Hosanna.

Pray

Here is my suggestion for prayer: read Psalm 8 three or four times. Slowly. Use it to praise God. Use it to praise the risen Jesus.

Then look at the hearts of some children you know and ask, 'What have I lost by growing old in my faith? What do I need to recapture?' And give it to God.