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“Have Therefore This Mind...”

Text: Philippians 2:5-11, Luke 22:14-23.56

What a reversal! What a turn around in the course of events!

In so saying, I am not talking about the fate of the Health Reform Bill over the course of the last six weeks or so. Nor am I talking about the waxing and waning of the influence of either political party over the last twenty years, or even over the last forty. Nor, for that matter, am I talking about the fate of any particular sports team, such as Kansas which went from being the top ranked college basketball team to a quick exit from the NCAA tournament. I am not even talking about the turn around of the fortunes of a team such as the New Orleans Saints which went from being the doormat of the NFL, representing a similarly battered city, to being the NFL champions. No, the reversal I am talking about is the reversal of events that took place during the first Holy Week. For, during that week, events moved quickly from the wild enthusiastic cheering of the crowd that greeted Jesus exclaiming “Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” to the same crowd at the end of the week shouting with blood curdling viciousness, “Crucify him!” What a reversal it is, indeed, that takes place as Jesus moves from being treated as a king to being crucified alongside common criminals.

I have often wondered, and quite seriously wondered, what Jesus might have been thinking on that first Palm Sunday as he rode in triumph through the streets of Jerusalem. It was indeed a triumphal procession, and he seems to have played no small part in arranging it. He did not slip quietly into town for the Passover festival in order to avoid detection, as John tells us he had done twice before. This time he deliberately sought out a way to bring to everybody’s

attention the prophet's vision of a triumphal king entering into the Holy City. Not only does he help arrange the procession, he encourages the crowd's enthusiasm. When the Pharisees are embarrassed and worried about the wild cheering of the crowd, they ask Jesus to tell the crowd to put a lid on it. He tells them that there is no quieting that can be done, for if his disciples were to be quiet, well, then the very stones would cry out. Not only will he not suppress the enthusiasm, he even seems to see it as somehow necessary.

Yet, as St. John tells us, at one point early in his ministry, Jesus did not trust himself to the opinions of others, because he knew what was in them. He knew what is in the human heart, and he knew that reversals happen all the time, that today's hero is tomorrow's heel. Surely that had not changed as he rode into town; surely he had not forgotten that that is the case. Surely, the shouting had not gone to his head letting him deceive himself about what is in the human heart. No, for as all the Gospel writers tell us, he had headed to Jerusalem in the first place not to be crowned as king, but to suffer and die, even to die ignominiously. He knew what was coming. He had told the disciples about it in no uncertain terms. After they had first recognized and confessed him as the Son of God, he sat them down and told them that he was to suffer and die. He also told them that if they wanted to be his disciples, well, they had better be prepared to take up their crosses, too. So, as he sat on that donkey, listening to the crowd cheer, he knew there was a reversal coming. And since he knew that, one indeed wonders what he must have been thinking as they cheered.

Perhaps he had a wry smile on his face that hid a certain cynicism about the lack of self knowledge of the crowd. Perhaps he was daydreaming about how it could be otherwise. Nikos Kazantzakis in his great novel *The Last Temptation of Christ* has it that the last great temptation of Christ was a dream he had wherein he had managed to suppress the wild urge, the fire in the

bones, that made him preach the coming of the kingdom. It was a dream in which he left the trail to Jerusalem and had gone off and gotten married, set up a home, and had lived a comfortable life, watching his children and his grandchildren grow, and wherein he died, not alone and in agony, but in comfort. Perhaps he simply gritted his teeth, and saw this as a part that had to be played.

We, of course, do not and cannot know the particulars of his mind on that day. But I think what we can know is that in its depths, his mind had not changed. I think we know that he was constant in his purpose from beginning to end, and that he always knew what had to be done, despite the temptations either to be cynical about the crowd, or to foolishly believe that the crowd could determine the policy of heaven, or despite the simple temptation to worry just about himself, the temptation “to tend his own garden,” as Voltaire was later to suggest was what really made for human happiness.

What was it about his mind that had not changed? Not many years later, St. Paul told us exactly what it was, and told us exactly we always know about Christ’s mind. For Paul recommended that same set of mind to us. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,” he said, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death.”

Whatever the particulars of Jesus’ thinking on that day, his mind was constant, as it always had been. It was set on the same thing that it had always been set on, and it meant to achieve that one thing in the way he had always meant to achieve it. He was not looking to lord his status over others. As one ancient church father, Theodoret, expressed it, “... having equality

with God, he thought this no great thing, as is the way of those who have received some honor beyond their merits, but, hiding his merit, he elected the utmost humility.” His mind was, as it always was, to give himself up to God’s own will that he might save a humanity that forever seemed to need saving as it set itself in opposition to the will of God. As a consequence, we, humanity, have always swung wildly from great aspirations to pathetic self hatred, from wanting independence to wanting to be taken care of, from dreams of heaven to fields of blood. His mind was to save us by humility, and not by the exaltation of his own glory or power. We have seen too much of the aspiration to power and glory; there is our problem. We don’t seem to know any other way. We don’t know how to turn it around, and cannot really conceive of turning it around might mean, for that matter.

In that constancy of mind, in that constant humility of mind that was the wish to obey God and save us, Jesus reversed the values of power and glory and the value of humility. Humility became the greatest virtue and power the thing of which one needed to be suspicious. In that Jesus effected the greatest reversal of all, a reversal that would never itself be reversed. Because of his constant humility and willingness to suffer, sorrow would now be reversed into joy. Because of this mind that was in Christ Jesus, those who had sown in tears would reap in joy. For, as a result of his emptying of himself, Paul continues, “therefore God has highly exalted him, and has given him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Because of his constancy of mind, this constant humility of mind which sought not its own glory, in the end the great reversals of this week were themselves reversed. As we go through this week, seeking the reversal of all that undoes the greatest hopes of the human heart,

let us above all things therefore heed Paul's exhortation, and let us "have therefore this mind, which is ours in Christ Jesus."