

Of Drums, Eggs, Palms, Butterflies and Baseball Bats

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell



Mark 11:1-11

I was out for a walk one morning this week, my daily constitutional. I had my ear buds in and my iPhone tuned to one of my music playlists. And somewhere in the midst of Beethoven and the Allman Brothers up popped into my ears, quite to my surprise on a warm March morning, the Harry Simeone Chorale version of The Little Drummer Boy. Four days before Palm Sunday and I'm listening to The Little Drummer Boy. Most of us know the song about a little drummer boy who has join the pilgrimage to Bethlehem to bring gifts to the newborn Christ child. And the boy grows worried over what little he has to offer the king. "Baby Gesu, I am a poor boy too. I have no gift to bring that's fit to give a king. Shall I play for you on my drum? he asks. And, of course the answer is yes: I played my drum for him, I played my best for him. And the baby smiles.

We love that song, we love that story because it speaks to something so deeply true about something so deeply real – and that is that whatever gift we choose to give out of our hearts is of infinite value. Every gift that comes from within here, the sacredness of our souls, matters a great deal.

The Little Drummer Boy, as it turns out, is based upon an old French story called Our Lady's Juggler that tells the tale of an itinerant juggler that goes from town to town juggling before whatever crowds he can attract. He is quite a

juggler, but makes as much as to keep himself barely alive. He meets a monk who encourages him to join the monastery. The juggler decides what better thing to do with one's life but to offer the rest of one's days in cloistered devotion. He joins the brothers in the monastery. And he soon learns that it is each brother's practice to offer to the Blessed Mary his greatest gift. He notices brothers singing, sculpting, painting – all lovely gifts to bring to the Blessed virgin. But all the juggler knows is to juggle. He is ashamed. He has no gift to bring that's fit for the Queen of heaven. And then it dawns on him to give her his greatest gift – so he juggles before the statue of Mary. He juggles the best he knows how. On his hands and on his feet. He juggles his heart out. He juggles though to the abhorrence and ridicule of his fellow brothers. They are mortified that one would juggle before the statue of the Blessed Mary. And just as they are prepared to take the juggler away – the granite figure comes to life and the mother of Jesus steps from her pedestal and takes the fold of her azure robe and with a smile wipes the sweating brow of the juggler.

Whatever gift we choose to give out of our hearts is of infinite value. Every gift that comes from within the sacredness of or souls matters.

I suppose that was part of the point that John the Gospel writer was trying to tell when he told his version of the story of the feeding of the five thousand. It's the only miracle story of Jesus that makes it into all four of the Gospels - this amazing account of Jesus and the disciples faced with 5000 hungry people – 5000 vs. 13 – and the disciples do the quick math and say well this isn't going to work. Best we send these people away to fend for themselves. We could work for six months and we wouldn't make enough to feed these folks. But then when John tells the story all of sudden this little boy brings Jesus his lunch.

He has enough lunch for himself, but he gives Jesus his lunch because maybe that might help. Five little barley loaves and two sardine size fish. And Andrew asks the adult question, "But what are these among so many?" And Jesus says – "You have no idea. What comes from the heart is of infinite value." And Jesus takes the little boys lunch, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it – and 5000 are fed. Five loaves, two fish ... what are they among so many? You have no idea.

Whether you live in Jerusalem or Sarasota you

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might wonder what value could there be to a palm branch, a palm frond. You don't have to walk more than 50 feet anywhere in this town and you are within reach of hundreds of palm fronds. They're in just about every back yard. Landscaping and gardening trucks pass by down Bee Ridge every day filled with pruned palms on their way to the compost pile. What is the big deal about a palm branch? Well, this morning we have an answer, don't we? This morning Jesus is making his way down the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem and the word is out that this rabbi isn't just any rabbi. He's feeding five thousand, he's healing the sick, he's restoring sight to the blind, he is cleansing lepers, he is teaching a new teaching. Now to the rich religious folks this may not matter much but to these Jerusalem peasants who have gotten the word that this

might be the promised Son of David – the promised Messiah – they don't got much. But they do have these palm trees. They do have these palm branches – and boy when you wave those palm branches they say a lot. A thousand people waving palm branches says a lot. So they don't got much, but from the bottom of their hearts they reach for these palms and they wave – they ripple the air and they pave the way with their palms and their coats. It ain't much but it's all they got. And the kingdom of angels says, you have no idea. You have no idea the value of a gift

that comes from the heart. That wherever the gospel is told – they are going to tell this story. The story of the waving palms that rippled the air and sent gales of good news across the globe.

Because we all know the physics of it, right? We all know the physics behind what they call the Butterfly Theory. The Butterfly Theory is the theory that small causes can have in time large effects. That a small ripple of air can stir enough wind to effect a greater current that effects a greater current and that in turn creates enough disturbance that within a couple weeks a hurricane can form in another part of the world. The Butterfly effect says that the flap of a butterfly's wings over Brazil can be the start of a hurricane in the middle of the Pacific (certainly not the Atlantic, that would be bad luck.)

So when 20 centuries ago a young peasant girl

climbs a palm tree and cuts down a branch and runs to the dirt path descending down the mountain and she sees the kind face of the Son of David and she does the only thing she knows to do – wave her palm – God knows what ripple that made in the world of human events. Who was to know that 20 centuries later a young Florida girl would walk down a carpeted aisle and wave the very same branch??? A gift from the heart is of infinite value and can make an inestimable difference.

It is what we have been learning through these last several weeks of our Open Palms campaign – that when faced with the spiritual hunger of the world – masses that yearn for a little good news – that when each of us digs deep inside and wonders what to give – that any gift from our heart, any sacrifice on our part – is a gift of inestimable value. Some were here a few weeks ago when little 6 year old Kate laid on the table her little carton of eggs – organic eggs that came from her little chicken that she raises and feeds on her family farm that she’s been selling under the tree for our church’s ministry. And then a week or two later a baseball bat that made its way to the table -- sold by one of our youth to give to the future of our ministry. And that set the rest of us to wondering and praying and digging deep into our hearts and stretching and giving up something in order to offer what we have to the Lord. And we have been bringing our loaves and our fish and the Lord says, “You have no idea what I can do with this! These gifts of inestimable value.” And so far these gifts have totaled just shy of four million dollars -- \$3.84 million to be precise. And that is an amazing amount of money. That is so far an incredible offering to the Lord. And Jesus says you have no idea what I can do with this. And while it is still a long stretch away from our appetite of what

we want to do and while we are still not done receiving people’s commitments and gifts toward this dream of building a family life center and while the Session will start fine tuning right away the project to fit our resources – we know that in the end a building will rise out of the ground and what will come about will be something incredibly beautiful and pleasing to the one who wants good news proclaimed in this weary world. Because whatever comes out of the sacredness of our souls will be of inestimable value and will make an infinite difference.

And this is what this week is all about. Right? This One before whom we wave our palms and lay our coats and serenade with Hosanna’s – this One is on his way to table. In a few days he will be at table. And at table with him are hungry men. 12 hungry men. Famished for grace and love and mercy. Around the table are those 5000. Hungry for grace and love and mercy. Around the table is the world. Hungry for grace and love and mercy. And before them just a loaf and a chalice. Bread and wine. And what are they among so many? And the host of the table says, “You have no idea.”

For from there it is to the cross. One solitary life to the cross. Palms open to receive the nails. God in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The world? The sin of the world? But what is one lamb among so many? And a voice from the heavens says, “You have no idea.”

And so in a moment we shall join that first century parade and sing Hosanna, Loud Hosanna – and we will parade out the door and into the world and on our way we will be handed a palm in the form of a cross – if anything to remember where this parade is going. Palm, table, cross. And each of these palm crosses, you’ve read, began in the palm of a Tanzanian

villager. Think of that. Each palm began in the palm of an African brother or sister who fashioned it and wove it. A child? An old man? A young woman? Someone we’ll never know held this palm in his or her hand – and fashioned a cross and today it shall over 8,000 miles miraculously be placed into your palm. I don’t begin to understand how that happens. But like that boy and his bread and fish – from his palm into the palms of many – I don’t begin to understand that either.

Of what value are these things? Palm, bread, cup, cross, egg, bat, drum, juggled balls, \$1? \$4 million dollars? Of what value? When from the heart ... when from the sacredness of our souls – infinite value.



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Church of the Palms

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