

March 28, 2010

MISSED WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.’” Luke 19:41-42

We live in the space age. Modern technological advances have made it possible for this nation to land men on the moon, send probing satellites to the farthest reaches of the universe, and retrieve and fix failing hardware through the space shuttle program.

For us who live in the space age, the word “window” had taken on new meaning. At the time of the launch of a rocket or space shuttle, we are told of the “launch window.” The “window” is that time in which it is possible to launch the rocket or the space shuttle into the desired orbit. After a certain time, the “window” will close. If the launch has not taken place and the “launch window” has passed, the mission will have to be “scrubbed.” And so the word “window” in this sense indicates a time of opportunity. When the “window” closes, the opportunity is lost.

Now then, “windows” do not close only for space rockets and shuttles. Windows close for people too. Consider those, for example, who fail to set their clocks forward in spring and, thus, are late for Sunday morning worship. (By the way, did that happen to any of you two weeks ago?) How many times have you shown up late for a meeting or an important appointment, only to have arrived in time to hear the closing prayer or miss the person you wanted to see? It happens to us all the time. Windows of opportunity close. Our mission has to be “scrubbed” and we have to start all over again.

Our Scripture lesson this morning deals with the closing of the most significant window in the entire history of humankind. And it happened on Palm Sunday. As Jesus came from the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem, he came to a place overlooking the city. There Jesus wept. He wept because the window of opportunity for the Hebrew people was about to close. Christ came offering the people of his day the chance to be the beginning of a new movement – a new kingdom. He knew that in only five short days he would be rejected and put to death on a hill outside the city walls. On Palm Sunday Jesus saw the window of opportunity closing. Knowing the consequences of that lost opportunity, Jesus wept. He shed tears because the people involved themselves in a foolish rebellion against his will.

On this Palm Sunday I would have us consider our “window,” that is, our opportunity to receive God’s grace and salvation our “window,” or opportunity to manifest his love and grace, that is, to do his work and will in the world.

First, we have the opportunity to receive God’s grace, love, and salvation. There is a time when this is available and there is a time when for a certain individual or situation, the window will have closed. The Jews of the first century did not have the faintest idea that the “window” of opportunity for them and their nation was about to close. They missed the best opportunity which had been given to them as the chosen people of God. In the words of Jesus: “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.”

Some may well wonder when the “window” of God’s grace is open for them. Paul answered that question in direct, precise terms. To the Corinthians he wrote: “Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). The window of God’s grace, the time of salvation, is NOW, TODAY!! The only time we ever have is “now.” The only time we have is “today.” The past has been taken from us. We cannot change what has happened in the past. The future will not become ours until the future becomes the present. Thus, the “window” for God’s salvation is “now.” It is “today.”

You know, it seems that many people have had great difficulty in recognizing the “now” and “today” when it comes to God. Our good intentions to establish a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ is postponed to some other time. There is an old gospel hymn that proclaims:

“Almost persuaded now to believe; almost persuaded Christ to receive:
Seems now some soul to say, go, Spirit, go thy way, Some more convenient day,
on Thee I’ll call.”

Friends, a more convenient day may never come. The day of salvation is now. Today is the time to hear his voice and receive his grace and love. Tomorrow the opportunity may be gone.

In the celebration of Palm Sunday we remember the palm branches and garments which were laid in Jesus’ path. We remember that he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. We remember that the crowd shouted: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” But, I

believe the real significance of Palm Sunday is that the people did not recognize the time when God came to save them.

Fortunately, we, in our lives, have the opportunity to be saved. The window is open for us to receive God's grace, his love, and his gift of salvation. Let us receive these wonderful things NOW, TODAY.

We also have the window of opportunity to manifest God's grace and love. Our opportunities to do the good which God calls us to do are limited. If we do not take advantage of God's opportunity in the time which is given to us, we may not have a second chance.

Consider the fact, if you will, that Jesus' ministry lasted only three years. From his baptism by John the Baptist to his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, only thirty-six months had passed. That is less time than most car loans. And yet, look at the volume of work that our Lord accomplished in this brief time. You see, Jesus understood the limited "window" in which he had to work. He even spoke of this on the occasion when he brought sight to the man who was blind. Jesus said: "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4). By these words Jesus was indicating that he had only a limited "window" in which to do the work he came to do.

We, too, live with "windows." We have limited time in which to do those things which we are called to do. Think, for example, of your family members. Your parents will not be with you forever. Have you ever told them how much you appreciate what they have done for you? Have you told them lately that you love them?

Or, how about your children? They will not always be living with you. The time will come when they will be gone. Do you regularly express to them your feelings of love and joy?

And, how about your wife or husband? Your spouse will not always be around. Oftentimes, in counsel with surviving spouses at the time of death, I hear these words: "I wish I had told him....I wish I had told her....how much I appreciated our life together." Of course, the same thing can be said for friends.

Do you know what? The "window" we have to express our appreciation may be smaller than we think. The work of loving and appreciating others must be done each and every day. It must be done NOW. Likewise, efforts to do his work

in our churches and communities must be done TODAY. It cannot be put off until tomorrow. For tomorrow, our opportunity may be gone.

In the words of Scripture: “We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work.” “Behold, now is the acceptable time.”

Have you ever heard the saying, “Opportunity knocks only once?” That may or may not be true. But, the real tragedy is, when opportunity knocks the first, second, or third time, we often do not open the door. On the first Palm Sunday the greatest missed opportunity of all time occurred. Jesus said to the people, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. You did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

Yes, the people of the first Palm Sunday missed the opportunity of a lifetime. Those who hailed him King on Palm Sunday shouted for his death five days later on Good Friday. The “window” of opportunity to receive God’s grace closed. The “window” of opportunity to manifest God’s grace also closed.

Fortunately, for us today, the “window” is still open. The opportunity is still there. Let not the mistake of the people on the first Palm Sunday be your mistake or my mistake. Let us willingly receive his grace and love. Let us manifest his grace and love. For “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

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