

Following the Children's Band

Matthew 21:1-17

Preached by Richard Bolin at Culver-Palms United Methodist Church

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The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'" [Matthew 21:14-16]

Anna and Matthias spent their days near the Temple in Jerusalem. They spent their nights there also. They did not have a home of their own. They were orphans; ever since that day that the tower of Siloam had collapsed and so many people had been killed, their parents being among them. Anna tried to take care of her little brother. It was not easy for a 9-year-old child to take care of her 7-year-old brother. But she had found some help. Near the Temple there was a community of beggars. Some were unable to walk. Some were blind. Many were children - either orphans or children from families so poor that they had to do what they could for themselves in order to have food to eat each day. There were such people all over the city, but these gathered near the Temple, perhaps hoping that this would be a place of compassion, and that some who entered or left the Temple would be more likely to take pity on these who begged.

Blind Jacob was their best friend. Anna and Matthias would take him by the hand when they moved through the streets. Jacob was always interested in what the children were doing, and at the end of the day they would share whatever they had with each other. It was almost like a family, but in this family the children had to act like grown-ups most of the time. Jacob would try and take care of them, but they also had to take care of Jacob.

But Anna and Matthias were still children, and because they had some friends who helped them, they were sometimes able to play like children play. They loved to use their imaginations. They pretended to do some of the things they saw people do when they came to the Temple. They did not see what people did inside the Temple, because there were guards who kept the beggars out. But they could hear the singing and the musical instruments, and they saw the parades. Those were the most exciting of all, during the special festival times of the year, the people would come to the Temple in a grand procession. There were musicians and dancers and singers - stringed instruments and trumpets and flutes and drums. Anna and Matthias would make their own parade, and they would imagine the music they would play. Anna imagined the music of the trumpet. There was a special tune that rang through her head – something like she had heard before, but not exactly. It was really her own song.

*Ta dat ta, Ta dat ta,
la da-ta-ta-ta-ta ta dat ta __;*

*Ta dat ta, Ta dat ta,
La da-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta ta__.*

But little brother Matthias was not very good at following Anna's parade. He had his own ideas, and it wasn't about trumpets loud and glorious. Matthias was more of a flute person. He, too, had his own special melody that stuck in his imagination. It wasn't a trumpet marching tune but a bird-singing tune:

*Di di-di-di da da da
Di di-di-di da da da
Di di-di da da da La___.
Di di-di-di da da da
Di di-di-di da da da
Di di-di da da da La__.*

Oh! How Anna and Matthias would have loved to join with the crowd as they danced and paraded and sang down the street and into the Temple. But beggar children were not allowed.

"What is that they are singing," Anna asked as the crowd went by.

"That is a Psalm of David," replied blind Jacob. "David was not only a great king, but also a great poet and musician. They say that when David was just a boy he played his lyre and sang songs for King Saul. His music was the only thing that would soothe the King's troubled spirit."

And Matthias thought to himself, David was just a boy playing for King Saul, but they won't let me sing in the Temple.

Anna and Matthias remembered many of the songs that the people sang in their grand processions. Even though they were not allowed to take part, sometimes the words seemed like they spoke directly to them.

*O LORD our God,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
Your glory is seen in the heavens above.*

*Out of the mouths of babes and infants
Comes your praise. [from Psalm 8]*

They had never seen any babies or infants in processions, not even any children – yet the words said, "Out of the mouths of babes and infants..."

Praise to the Lord ...

who lifts the weak out of dust, placing them among princes. [from Psalm 113]

Wouldn't that be wonderful, thought Anna and Matthias, for the weak such as themselves to be lifted out of the dust and placed among princes! ... for beggars and children such as themselves to leave the streets and enter into God's presence. But whenever they had approached the Temple they were turned back. They might come as close as the outer court, where merchants gathered selling sheep and turtle doves to be offered as sacrifices. But the children had no money with which to buy a sacrifice. It was as if the merchants in the outer-court of the Temple were a great wall that could not be climbed, a wide chasm that could not be crossed, and the holiness of the Temple remained far beyond their reach. The door to the presence of God was shut to the poor.

They heard the people sing in their grand processions.

Save us, we ask you, O LORD! ...

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. [from Psalm 118]

“Who is that,” asked Anna. “Who is the one who comes in the name of the Lord?”

“That would be the son of David,” said Jacob, “one who will be like David, a great King who will come and care even for us who beg in the streets.” Anna and Matthias and Jacob all wished that the son of David would come soon.

Not long after that the people in Jerusalem began to prepare for another festival. It was called Passover. Anna and Matthias wondered what kind of parade they would see this time. Many people were coming to the city from other places for the Festival. Perhaps some would be generous in giving to those who begged outside the Temple.

Suddenly there was a great commotion coming from the edge of the city. A parade had started, and a great crowd was coming to the Temple. Matthias started to run toward the noise, but Anna grabbed his hand. She knew they needed to stay with Jacob. If the crowd were to get big and start shoving, blind Jacob would need their help.

Then they saw the procession coming, but the Chief Priest was not leading it. Instead there was a man riding a donkey. People were waiving palm branches. They put their cloaks on the road under the donkey’s feet. The man was dressed simply, but the people were praising him like he was a king!

“Hosanna! Hosanna to the son of David!” Some were shouting. “Who is this?” others wanted to know. “Why is the city in such turmoil?”

“It is Jesus,” they heard someone say. “The prophet from Nazareth has come to Jerusalem. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Holding on to Jacob’s hands, Anna and Matthias found themselves swept up with Jacob into the crowd, and suddenly they were part of the procession. Jesus got off the donkey and went into the Temple courtyard. They couldn’t see what was happening, but it sounded like tables were being turned over, sheep and goats were running loose, turtle doves were flying free from their overturned cages. The crowd surged forward, through the courtyard. Jesus had crossed the chasm. The wall had come down. Anna and Matthias held tight to Jacob’s hands – and then for the first time they found themselves inside the Holy Temple of God. It was suddenly still. Jesus saw the two children holding the hands of the blind man. He came over to them. Jesus laid his hands on Jacob’s face, and when he took them away Jacob opened his eyes, and his face shone with a new joy that was as bright as a new day.

Then Jesus reached out to a woman with a withered arm and it became strong.

And then for some reason Anna thought of that trumpet tune that was always going through her head, except now it wasn’t a trumpet tune, it was a song, and she knew the words that went with her tune:

*Ho-san-na, Ho-san-na,
Ho-san-na to the son of David;
Ho-san-na, Ho-san-na__
He has come to save us now.*

And then Matthias remembered his flute tune, and it also had words. And the melody and the words went perfectly with Anna’s song:

*Bless-ed is he who comes,
Bless-ed is he who comes
In the name of the Lord*

*Bless-ed is he who comes,
Bless-ed is he who comes,
Comes to save us now.*

And there were many children who had come into the Temple that day. They heard this new song and they began to sing along. For the first time that anyone could remember there was a large children's choir singing in the Temple!

Well, all of this had happened so fast that the people who are usually in the festival parades to the Temple didn't have their normal place in front. They heard all the noise in their houses and looked out their windows and said, "What's all this? There was not a Temple processional scheduled for today!" And by the time they put on their fine robes and rushed down to the Temple all that I have told you about had already happened. They saw the overturned tables. They saw people who had been cured of their illnesses. And then they saw all these children who had followed Jesus right into the Temple, still dancing and singing Anna and Matthias' new song - and for some reason that seemed to bother them the most.

Seeing that Jesus was the cause of all this, they turned to him and demanded, "Make these children be quiet!"

But Jesus looked at the children, listened to their song and smiled. Then he reminded the Temple officials of what they should have known.

"Aren't you familiar with the song that David wrote long ago, which you yourselves have often sung as you processed into the Temple? 'O God... out of the mouths of babes comes your praise.'"

And the children kept singing.

*Ho-san-na, Ho-san-na,
Ho-san-na to the son of David;
Ho-san-na, Ho-san-na__
He has come to save us now.*

*Bless-ed is he who comes,
Bless-ed is he who comes
In the name of the Lord
Bless-ed is he who comes,
Bless-ed is he who comes,
Comes to save us now.*