

Palm Sunday – April 1, 2007

Phil. 2 Name that Brings Joy

G&P

Finding Neverland tells the story of how author James Barrie (Johnny Depp) wrote the wildly successful play Peter Pan in 1904.

The culture of the theater in Barrie's day was dominated by well-dressed patrons who expected dignified and "important" productions. Barrie sought to re-inject wonder and awe into his plays, even though he knew the crowds might not be pleased. So when opening night came for his fantastical tale Peter Pan, Barrie helped the audience enter Peter's kingdom of wonder by using one of the tactics of Jesus—he brought in children to show the way.

Much to the chagrin of the theater owner, Charles, Barrie reserves 25 seats for his "special guests." Charles presses Barrie to tell him who the seats are for and to give them up to paying customers, but Barrie will not relent even as the attendant rings the last call bell. As the grand doors begin to close, the camera pans from the glamorous theater steps to the darkened street where 25 children are being escorted by nuns.

Barrie says, "Charles, they're here. Do forgive them for being a bit late—short legs and a long walk from the orphanage."

"I'm not clear on what they're doing here," Charles replies.

"They've come to see the play."

Charles says, "Now my nightmare is complete."

As the orphans take their seats, the disapproving patrons raise their eyebrows. As the curtain rises, the orphans let out squeals of delight, hanging on every word of the opening lines. The tuxedoed adults, not quite grasping the wonder of the play, look askance at these ragamuffin children who have caught on immediately. And then the adults look again at the stage and their eyes start to brighten and they begin to chuckle. Infected by the children, the patrons soon get caught up in the wonder of the play.

When the opening act closes the audience roars in applause. The now-convinced Charles peers in from a side curtain at the exuberance and simply whispers, "Genius."

As is the case in the Kingdom of God, it is often the least of these and the children who enter first and show us the way.

Finding Neverland (Miramax Films, 2003); written by Allan Knee and David Magee, directed by Marc Forster; submitted by Bill White, Paramount, California

It is the children who love the joy of the story and the parade. It is the children who touch our funny bones and the joy of the kingdom. The laughter and joy are infectious and one cannot help to feel it. A joy that comes from the very heart of God.

St. Paul writes in Philippians 2:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Jesus Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Paul teaches us in these words the very essence of what it means to be followers of Jesus, Crucified and Risen. He writes to the people in Corinth and encourages them in the joy of faith and living as a community of Faith. These words are filled with a description of what this will look like in our walk together.

Comfort in love

Fellowship in the Spirit

Tenderness and Compassion

Be of the same love, be one in the Spirit and one in Purpose. Watch what your motives are < be careful of selfishness and pride. Remember we are in this walk in faith together. You have interests but look at them in unity with the interests of others.

Paul is painting a picture of this Christian community that dares to live the way our Lord Jesus lived:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

**but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

**And found in human likeness,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death--
even death on a cross!**

**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

This is where Joy is found. This is where joy is created. That joy is the very essence of God, more than happiness, a joy that is tempered by the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. A joy made real for us and possible for us in our baptisms into Jesus Christ.

This is the Sunday of Joy. The Sunday that we welcome Jesus just as the people welcomed him into Jerusalem. This is the Sunday of the palms. But if it just ended here it would be just another parade. But when we see this Sunday of Joy as the beginning of the week called Holy, we discover what this Joy of God is all about. It is about you. All that Jesus does is for you and me. All that Jesus suffers, all that he says, all that he does, he does for us. So that we might have that joy.

In his 35 years with the United Nations system, Kofi Annan has come to be known as an evenhanded man with an ability to see the individual as well as the big picture. It is this quality that makes him one of the more popular executives in the United Nations.

As a 17-year-old school boy in Ghana, Annan learned an unforgettable lesson.

One day our headmaster walked into the classroom and put up a broad sheet of paper with a small black dot in one corner. "Boys," he asked, "what do you see?" All of us shouted in unison, "A black dot!" Then he said, "So not a single one of you saw the large white sheet of paper? Don't go through life with that attitude."

Jesus sees the entire picture, he sees that all he does will serve God's love for the world God created. There is no one who is not in that picture.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This is the whole picture that God never loses sight of, no matter what direction we might take in our lives. No matter what decisions that we make in our lives, God has made the decision to love us. Period. God has lifted up Jesus name as the name that is above every other name, heaven, on earth and under the earth. Jesus is the name that brings salvation for all who embraced it in faith.

So why doesn't everyone believe? Why do we only see the dot on the paper and not the whole picture? Why do we only see our immediate needs? There are sometimes in our life in which the pain or circumstance in our lives is so overwhelming that we cannot even see the dot. It is in that moment that we need Jesus. It is in that time that we need the name that is above every other name. It is only in that name will the curtain of death be raised so that we can see the light of the new dawn. It is only in that name will we begin to see a new this grace of God that redeems us and saves us.

On July 23, 1992, the local police chief in Beattyville, Kentucky, told Rosemary Smith and her husband, Luther, that two of their sons—Jeremiah, 15, and Drew, 18—were dead. The brothers were returning from a concert in Indianapolis, Indiana, when they crashed their vehicle.

Darkness like nothing she had ever known settled over Rosemary. Yet, she found solace in her faith. While following the hearses to the burial site, she heard church bells toll 33 times. "As I sat there and counted," said Rosemary, "it hit me that when Jesus died he was 33, which was also the combined ages of my sons."

Not long after her loss, Rosemary began a ministry called Fellow Travelers, a ministry to other grieving parents who have lost a child. "I feel this is my mission on Earth," Rosemary said of the ministry. "I now have a higher purpose than what I was doing, and the death of my sons took me there."

Every day, Rosemary reads the newspaper and searches the Internet for child obituaries. She either calls the families or sends them special packets consisting of books on loss, a music CD, a three-ring notebook of inspirational messages, and more. She gets about 50 e-mails a day from people requesting one of her packets. More than 5,000 packets—paid for by Rosemary and her husband—have been sent all over the world.

"We are here to help other people," said Rosemary. "It gives me great joy thinking God is using me to help others."

Kara Bussabarger, "A Fellow Traveler," The Southeast Outlook (12-15-05); submitted by Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky

The joy that was complete in Jesus reaching out to those in need Jesus. Friends in Jesus, the one crucified and risen for you, come to the altar. For here God meets us in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Come all of you who are heavy in heart and hurt in the soul. Come all who are in need of having your faith boosted. Come one and all taste the Feast of Victory of our Lord.

AMEN