

Palm Sunday

March 28, 2010

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 32:36-39

Sermon Title: "A Piece of the Rock"

Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Our text for Palm Sunday is taken from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy where Moses recorded the following in a portion of his song of praise to the Lord, saying:

"Then (Yahweh) will say: 'Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge...'"

This is our text.

There is an insurance company that used to advertise with the slogan, "Get a piece of the rock!" Maybe they still do, but I am not here to endorse or advertise for a particular insurance company. The point of the slogan was that people could depend on this brand of insurance to see them through the difficult times, that—like the Rock of Gibraltar or Mount Everest—they were steady and "rock solid" in times of disaster when everything and everyone else was falling apart.

And the question that our text asks this morning is one that has to be examined seriously, for the outcome is certainly serious. Moses asks: "Which rock is your rock?" In other words, are you putting your trust in other false gods made of stone, or are you claiming the true Rock as your own? In the verses leading up to our lesson for this morning, we learn one simple fact: "Their rock is not like our Rock". Once we understand this fact, we can clearly tell the stark differences between their rock and our Rock, the true Rock, and between their gods and our God, the true God, the only God. In this song of Moses, he ascribes greatness to our Rock. He says in verse four of this chapter:

"The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."

This Rock of justice, uprightness, and greatness is also the Rock of salvation who has begotten us. What about the other rock? The best we can say of this rock is that you can't count on it. The Lord in his judgment says:

"Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge?"

This rock offers nothing to those who want to put their trust in it. It doesn't offer justice. It doesn't offer comfort. It doesn't offer righteousness. It certainly doesn't offer salvation. It can offer nothing at all. It can't provide anything to those who flock for protection in its emptiness.

One example of this type of rock is the New Age "faith" and spirituality that Oprah Winfrey claims and supports on her TV talk show. Of course, because Oprah is on TV five days a week and gives away cars on her show, than we should be intelligent enough to believe every word she says, right? Oprah says that many different roads lead to heaven, and if you are gullible enough to believe that faith in Jesus is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life, then you are either ignorant or just plain stupid.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who look to Oprah for their answers in their day-to-day lives, don't they? And if not Oprah, then someone else who is thought to be "smart enough" to know that all the answers can't come from one rock, from one faith, or from one God.

And so the Rock says of this rock:

"Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection!"

It's going to be a long wait for those who seek this kind of help and protection. In the next verse, verse 39, the Lord our Rock does everything to direct Israel's attention away from any other rock, any crumbling block of sandstone, to Him alone, saying:

"See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand."

There is no pebble, no rock that will ever be able to rise against this Rock and crush Him. "There is no god besides Me!" says the Lord. No one can deliver from His hand, and *He alone can deliver*.

Deliverance is the exact thing His people need; it's the thing they've always needed. The Lord looks on those who have tried their own way out, chased after their own idols, built their confidence upon their own ramparts, and are now laid low. As Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians:

"They drank from the same spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

They have slipped, their gods have worn out on them, and they are left in need of compassion. They need deliverance. So the Lord

offers the following words through His servant Moses:

“For the Lord will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining bond or free.”

Those rock gods didn't work out so well for them: a god of gold rock shaped in the form of a golden calf was crushed into powder and digested in their stomachs. Not much hope for salvation or anything else, is there?

Which rock is your rock? Who is your source of hope? To whom do you turn for deliverance? Even with a good understanding of the temporary nature of the rocks in which we often seek refuge, we still often look to them. Watch a half hour of the daily news, read a page from the newspaper, or listen to a friend who has fallen on hard times, or look back at your own week, and you will be clearly and powerfully reminded of the deserts and wastelands of the world in which we live. The gods and idols of this age can offer no help or direction in this wilderness. The rocks of this time can't offer any shelter from the eroding winds of the troubles that haunt you. All that you trust to save you from these deserts look back at you with vacant eyes, dead to offer any more hope than the desert itself. “Let them rise and help you; let them be your protection!”—but they never will.

But your cry is just as loud. Your need is as great. You feel the stress of time, pain, loss, sickness and past mistakes weighing you down. You travel through this wilderness on your own mission to discover a source of pleasure that can mask the pain, maybe for a little while, yet this journey leaves you further in the desert, further from any hope.

“Let them rise and help you, and be your protection?” It's just not going to happen. But going back to verse 39: “now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside Me.” No other deliverance, no other hope, no other comfort, no other One who will have compassion to the point of salvation.

On this Palm Sunday, notice the cry of the people as Jesus enters Jerusalem: “Hosanna, hosanna. Save us, please.” Save us, please, from who we are. Save us, please from that to which we are imprisoned. Save us, please, from eternal destruction. Notice that even when the Pharisees demand that Jesus quiet the request of the multitudes, Jesus explains the importance of this request by saying that if the crowds are silent, the rocks will cry out. Even the stones will cry out! And what exactly would they cry, if the crowd's plea had been silenced?

Have you ever thought of that? Have you ever wondered what the stones would cry out if no one else did? “Hosanna! Hosanna!” The need for deliverance from the wilderness into which sin, death, and the power of the devil cast us is so great that even the stones will cry out for deliverance.

The cries are heard. The groanings of all creation are heard. The Lord keeps His promises to those whom He has chosen to deliver. And look at how it is accomplished! The Rock of Ages enters in, the Rock of Ages is numbered among the transgressors, and the Rock of Ages has come not to be delivered, but to deliver. “Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not my will, but your will be done.”

And so it is that the God who can kill and make alive, who can wound and heal, lays on the Lamb the iniquity of us all. That which had fallen on the shoulders of the people, smitten and healed, again and again, now came crashing down on the shoulders of the One who would be crushed and smitten for us all, once and for all, and on the third day be brought back to life, victorious over that which had caused his people to be smitten so severely.

And now this is the message for us today: that punishment which we so truly and justly deserve because of our sin has bruised His heel, torn His flesh, and killed Him on the tree. And just as He has risen from the dead, so too are we healed to live a new life in Him through the waters of Baptism. Certainly the Lord our God says it all when He says, “There is none that can deliver out of My hand.” For as St. Paul says in his letter to Romans:

“I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

No one can reverse what He has done or stop what he does today.

Which rock is your rock? To whom do you turn for deliverance? The answer is easy: the One who has turned to you, the One who has claimed you, the One who has delivered you before it even occurred to you to ask, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

And now the peace of God...