

Series: PALM SUNDAY & EASTER—April 1, 2007

SIMPLE IS THE NEW SMART
Matthew 18:1-6; 19:13-15; 21:8-16

I. INTRO

- A. As you know, kids say some hilarious things! Some kids were asked, **How do you decide who to marry?** Kristin, age 10, wrote, “No person really decides before they grow up who they’re going to marry. God decides it all the way before, and you get to find out later who you’re stuck with!”
 -When asked, **How would you make a marriage work?** Ricky, age 10, said, “Tell your wife that she looks pretty, even if she looks like a truck!”
1. And sometimes what children say is simply profound. A group of professionals asked a group of kids, aged 4 to 8, “What does love mean?”
 -**Noelle, age 7**, said, “Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day.”
 -**Billy, age 4**, said, “When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth.”
 2. It gets even more interesting when you talk to kids about God. The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The nun made a note and posted it on the apple tray. **Take only ONE. God is watching!** Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A child had written a note, **Take all you want. God is watching the apples!**
 3. I like this one even better. A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales. The teacher said that it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human being because even though it was a very large mammal, its throat was very small. The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale couldn’t swallow a human—it was physically impossible! The little girl said, “When I get to heaven I will **ask** Jonah.” The teacher said, “Well, what if Jonah went to hell?” The little girl replied, “Then **you** ask him!”
- B. So. What does God have to say about kids? Actually, some very interesting things. Jesus said to those around Him, “You need to watch kids! Learn from **them!**” **Learn what?** I suppose that we need to learn that we’re not as wise and sophisticated as we think we are. That true greatness and success are way different than we think they are. And that **simple** is what God is looking for. So, anyone here ready for **simple?**

II. ADVENTURE’S IN MISSING THE POINT

- A. On Palm Sunday we celebrate the day when it would appear that the best dreams of Jesus’ disciples had come true. It would seem that, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, **everyone** now believed in Jesus as they did. Because of Passover, the population had swelled to several hundred thousand people. And they were **all** cheering. Listen to what the official record says:
A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,
"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it 'a den of robbers.' "

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise (Matt. 21:6-16 TNIV).'"

1. The breadth of response here is amazing. Some—like Jesus' disciples—were higher than a kite. Some were just having a good time. Some—like the guys selling in the temple who felt the sting of Jesus' whip--were embarrassed and angry.

-But something much deeper is going on. At the temple—right at the center of attention, right where all the religious professionals did their thing—Jesus healed blind and lame people. This was absolutely amazing stuff. No one—apart from the power of God—could do this. And yet, look at the reactions. Kids—who see this—are in essence calling Jesus the Messiah.

And some of the best trained, most sophisticated, most devout religious people who have ever walked this planet are indignant—and can barely contain their contempt and hatred.

-Two groups of people viewing the miraculous—the naïve, the simple get it profoundly right; the wise people who had all the answers—**WRONG!**

2. Actually, when you look at the pattern of what Jesus taught—it fits. He once made the statement, ***Oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike! Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way (Matt. 11:25-26 NLT).***

-It would appear that God isn't looking for knowledge or sophistication, or people who think they've got the inside track on wisdom; what **He's** looking for is more child-like. What does that mean?

- B. If you were a detective or CSI person, you'd find that this dialogue actually starts with his disciples asking a blatantly egotistical question: **"Which of us is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me (Matt. 18:2-5 NLT).**

1. Jesus and his disciples were probably at Peter's home in Capernaum when this happened—and the child Jesus picked up may have been one of Peter's toddlers.

And there are two parts to this statement that must've rocked their world. First, they would never get **into** the kingdom of Heaven unless they turned from their sins and became like little children. Second—that it was people who would become as **humble** as a little child who would be the greatest.

- a. Anyone have a clue as to what Jesus is dealing with here? It's ego. Kids can be selfish, but they don't strut their stuff over what they have and who they are and how many important people they know. They **don't!**

-But we get sucked into it, don't we? Oh, we learn great ways to **hide** our pride and keep it socially acceptable—but it's there. Jesus is saying, "In **my** Kingdom—the ground is level. The only way to come is as a sinner with nothing to offer God."

-And that is exactly what alienates people from Jesus. "I'm not **that** bad! Yes, I have a few faults that occasionally get out of control—but **I'm not like a little kid coming to their Dad!** Jesus says, "Want to be part of a kingdom that lasts forever? You have to come like a child. No one struts in, polishing their fingernails, offering God their resume. No one."

- b. In fact, Jesus once talked about this with a very sophisticated, learned teacher and leader. He said, "In this new way of life, you have to start over—just like a newborn." And it took this man—Nicodemus--about three years to think that one over before he finally responded.

-The world system we live in is the opposite. Read the papers. Watch the news. Look around in our world. In this system, if you make a bunch of money, or achieve success, or are talented in acting, sports or music—man, you're right at the top of the heap. Even if you're a jerk and even if you have absolutely no moral scruples.

-But not with Jesus. If you want to be great forever, great where it really counts—great in a way that lasts forever—you've got to become like a little kid. Think of what little kids are like. They're **perfectly** comfortable with asking questions when they don't know something. **Thousands** of them! Adults struggle to admit they don't know something. Ask a kid—they'll say, "I'm just a little kid. I don't know that!" They say thing like, "I need help! Pick me up. I can't see! I don't understand! I'm too small. I'm scared."

-And have you ever noticed that little kids are eager to help? **Too** eager! They can be silly and not be self-conscious; they can be naïve and not feel stupid. They know **how** to pretend—but, unlike adults, they **know** it's pretend! the way up is the way down.

-Jesus is saying, "The way up...is **down!**"

Given how big and sophisticated and brilliant and all-knowing God is—I think humility is in order, don't you? I think humble is **smart!**

2. But that whole scene didn't stick for the disciples. But we **know** better, don't we! It sticks with us. All adults get it now, **right?** Well...? Jesus used another occasion to point this out. This time parents were bringing their children to Jesus

for him to do what we call a **dedication**. Very common in that culture. Parents would bring their children to a Rabbi for him to hold them and bless them.

-Well, the disciples shoed them away. In fact, there's some sense that they were repeatedly threatening them. This time Jesus lost it—I mean, he didn't lose his temper—but he was **angry** with them. **Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left (Matt. 19:14-15 NLT).**

-Imagine Jesus' disciples deciding that they would help Him, Son of God, manage his **time** better—when He **created** time. What an adventure in **missing the point!**

a. Jesus' point was that the Kingdom of heaven **belongs** to those who are like these children. Anyone know how to receive the Kingdom? You ask—in simple faith. Simple trust. Kids **trust**. Sometimes they trust the wrong people.

-If you tell a child something is true—they believe it. If they're up on something, and you hold your arms out—they don't do mental logarithms. They jump.

b. When the Bible talks about the **Kingdom of God** or **Heaven**, it's simply talking about the span of God's leadership. Where he's in charge. If He's truly Lord of a person's life—they're part of his Kingdom. If they won't accept his leadership—they're not. Who leads in a home—parents, or kids? Well, it's **supposed** to be the parents—because parents are **responsible**. Responsible for making sure they're fed, that they get rest, that they're safe. It's not really a democratic system.

-You can't be a part of God's **Kingdom**—and God **not** be king. There's a very good reason for **Him** to be King and not us. See if you can guess what it is? He's God. Compare yourself to Him for a minute. Your love, your strength, your knowledge, your insight into the future. All done? How'd you do? Friends, there's a reason why **extreme humility** is in order.

-Maybe what Jesus is **really** saying is, "You need to understand how much you need God if you're going to hang with Him!"

C. The passage I quoted earlier opens this whole thing right up. The context is Jesus condemning the arrogance and unbelief of cities where he had done **hundreds** of miracles—and their stubborn refusal to believe. And, in his prayer, these words:

...Thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike (Matthew 11:25-26 NLT)!

1. So, does God intentionally hid truth from smart, successful, resourceful people? No, look again. The issue is pride; **those who think themselves wise and clever**. By the way, there is an arrogance that comes with knowledge and degrees and prestige and acclaim and success and money. Has anyone here ever picked up on that? You need to know, **pride** will make you a spiritual imbecile. It's amazing. The Bible says over and over and over that if you're a proud person—you might as well paint a bullseye on your back. God has promised that He will take down the proud.

2. Now, listen to what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1.
As the Scriptures say, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.” So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God’s weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God (1 Cor. 1:19-21, 24-29).
- a. When Paul wrote these words in 55 A.D., Christianity was nothing and the Roman Empire was a big deal. The title **Caesar** brought fear and trembling to most people. Nero, who had just started his reign, would take the torture of believers to horrific proportions. And Paul would eventually die at his hands.
- Now, as I mentioned last December, we name our kids, “Peter, Paul, John and Mary”—and our dogs “Caesar and Nero.” The cross is like this stake through history, dividing it in two chunks--and Jesus’ name is known, and revered worldwide. No one sings songs about the big dog leaders who sneered at Jesus and got their backs up about children singing **Hosanna to the Son of David** in the temple courts. But today, in every nation of the world, people will sing about Jesus!
- Right now in the theatres, people are watching a film about another way Jesus touched this planet through his followers, ending slavery. And the title and the song, **Amazing Grace**, are about how this foolish message of the cross touches and changes the souls of sinners like me!
- b. In this unbelievable passage—shortly after some of the best philosophers wrote their stuff, Paul asks a profound question.
So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish... (1 Cor. 1:20 NLT).
- Think for a minute about all the philosophers who’ve written treatises and dissertations; and all the scholars who’ve studied and written books and won awards, and all the brilliant people who’ve debated the finer points of philosophy and theology and science and politics. What, exactly, do we have to show for it?
- We’ve got more gadgets, more theories, more books and more convenient lives. But...after 2000 years, are we better **people**? Are we happier? More peaceful? I mean, essentially, is the world a better place? Read history. Any progress we’ve made is due mostly to the influence of

followers of Jesus, not philosophers and debaters and scholars. See, **simple is the new smart.**

-Being smart and successful isn't a bad thing. But if you're brilliant and clever and sophisticated in your own eyes—you will probably miss God, and miss what He wants most. And what would that be? Well, simple trust, simple faith and simple humility.

III. GOD JUST WANTS US TO BE REAL AND TRUTHFUL

- A. What happened in the temple that day with Jesus and the kids and the religious professionals was very simple. Jesus' teaching was very straightforward. He claimed to be the way to God, and proved it with his miracles. He invited people to trust in **Him**. The children did—and the religious professionals didn't. And it wouldn't have made any difference **how** many miracles Jesus did that day. Even if they'd traveled to Bethany and talked to Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised after he'd been decaying in his grave 4 days. After Jesus' resurrection—know what they did? They planned a massive cover-up! I'd be thinking, "Wow! The guy I just helped crucified is alive. Hmmm! **Maybe I was wrong!**"
- What was the **matter** with them? Does anyone know? If Jesus was right—they were wrong—**way** wrong. To believe, they'd have to lay aside their pride, their success, their prestige, their degrees—the **edge** they had—and start over. And there was **no way** they were going to do that!
1. There are **hundreds** of stories on how the most brilliant people in companies miss paradigm shifts. RCA blew off the CD idea. The Swiss watchmakers blew off the concept of the quartz movement watch—that their own R&D people came up with.
- See, when you've stomped on other people to scratch and claw your way up the success ladder, how can you **ever** admit—or even see that it's leaning against the wrong building? When you've spent your telling people who believe that they're brainless idiots--where do you go from there? How do you bow your knee and say, "God, I really, really **desperately** need You—when all your life you've flipped Him off?"
- Paul struggled with this. See, he was in the winner's circle of religion. He **knew his Bible!** He had it all! Then Jesus confronted him and knocked him off his horse. Listen to what he says: **I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him (Phil. 3:7-9 NLT).**
- Paul says, "All my accomplishments, awards, degrees?" It's **garbage!** The actual Greek word he uses, **skubala**, has been translated very politely—as I've mentioned before. **Skubala** was more like a bumper sticker word, like **Skubala happens!** Paul had to shovel out of his heart—all the stuff he used to be proud of—so he could make room for Jesus.

-Jesus one compared his **Kingdom** to a guy finding a treasure in a field. The guy went out and sold **everything** to buy the field. If you've accumulated a lot of prestige and money and honor and kudos in the world system—it's likely that the price of humbling yourself is just too high.

2. Here's the pointed question: Is the price too high for **you** to **simply trust Jesus**—just like a child jumping into His Dad's arms? Can you—and will you—put your trust in Him—alone. Will you put aside all the stuff—all the good deeds and religious things—you'd be tempted to put on your resume to show Him just how good and worthy you are—and **simply trust Jesus**?

-I've told you about a phrase we use in our house. We force a family member to say it when they've **insisted** they were right—and **weren't**. Of course, I never have to do this—but the kids and Lori occasionally do. The words are, "I was **wrong**, and you were **right**." Try the words—they're actually quite hard. **I was WRONG and you were RIGHT!**

-And that's what we have to admit to God—because it's the **truth!** "Lord. I've tried all the wrong trails. They looked good at the time... I've trusted wrong things to bring me life and hope and contentment. But you were there all along—offering me life. It was so **simple**—but I missed your offer. And now I'm ready!" **Simple is the new smart.**

- B. There's another thing that kids are very good at. Being real and authentic. Kids will quite naturally tell you the truth. "I don't **like** that!" "Your breath smells!" They're not mean—sometimes just a little **too** honest! They haven't learned the fine art of buttering people up; spinning truth; pretending to be someone they're not, or knowing something they don't know.

-Can I just be really, really honest? There is a lot of deceit that goes on in the arena of education, wealth, success, popularity and power. And it gets exhausting!

-Some guy was following this semi down a curvy back-woods road—and couldn't pass him. What drove him bonkers was that every few miles, the semi would stop—and the driver would get out and run around the truck, banging on the sides with a crowbar. When this guy finally had his chance, he screeched around the semi—and slammed on **his** brakes, forcing the semi to stop.

He said to the driver, "I'm not moving until you tell me why you've been stopping and banging on the side of your truck for the past 25 miles!" The driver said, "Well, truth is, this truck can only carry 20 tons—and I've got 30 tons of canaries, so I gotta keep them flying!"

1. Deceit is like trying to keep 30 tons of canaries flying! Any kind of deceit—any kind of image management complicates life. If you've deceived people—you have to remember **who** you deceived, and what you said. If you're trying to impress people—then you have to live up to the expectations you've set. If, financially, you're putting on a show for the people around you—then you have to either make enough or go in debt to keep the places spinning.

-Even if you can afford lots of stuff, all that stuff has to be maintained and stored and managed. Want to be successful? Well-known? Well, you have to manage

that—because suddenly everyone knows you and **sees** you—even when you wish they didn't.

2. I want you to think about how it would simplify life if you could say: I don't have to **judge, categorize, or fix** others. I don't have to be **successful, together, articulate, infallible or slick**. And I don't have to be **right! Really!**
 -Jesus offered to simplify our lives by forgiving us—if we would own our past. Then we don't have to drag our past with us. And we don't have to drag the massive bag filled with all the wrongs others have done to me.
 I don't have to waste time being greedy while trying to *appear* modest. I don't have to waste time trying to satisfy embarrassing urges and manage my image.

-It's like Jesus is saying, "Life could so much simpler! You don't **have** to impress. You don't **have to** appear spiritual. You don't **have** to be a control freak! You don't **have** to be **strong, capable, smart, or knowledgeable!** Puzzled about what to do to please and honor God? Love God with everything—and love other people like you love yourself. It's **that** simple. Puzzled about what loving others means? Treat them like **you** would like to be treated. Puzzled about that future? That's in **my** hands—not yours. Trust me—and you'll be **surprised** how well things turn out. **SIMPLE IS THE NEW SMART!**

- C. But the child-like quality Jesus looked for most in his followers—and, I'd dare say, is **still** looking for—is humility. And, for us, that's upstream. Cause everyone in our world is going after popularity, wealth, good looks, success, fame and intelligence. And these things, when we **seek** them, are the enemies of humility.
 1. Again—God hate's pride. It's the thing that makes successful people patronize those who aren't. It's what makes people who are healthy and in good shape sneer at and look down on people who aren't. It's what makes the jocks and stars and professors on any campus ignore the unpopular and the unintelligent. Watch CEOs with underlings and the prima donas in the music industry, and the professional athletes—our world **reeks** of pride and arrogance!
 -The tragedy is that this stuff gets into the spiritual realm. It gets into the hearts of religious professionals—like me! The ordained. The people who **know** their Bibles—and can use all God's favorite words when they pray. People **very** good at image management. And when we do that, God gets disgusted and leaves!
 2. When God rode into Jerusalem that Sunday morning 2000 years ago, the most religious people in the world **missed** Him! See, they had too much to lose! Besides, they had God all figured out—and He sure didn't look like **this** hick! They were well-known, well-thought of. They were in the winner's circle, and the nest they'd built was just too cushy to give up. And they wouldn't do it! Not for Jesus!
 -And in their pride, they never realized that God had humbled himself--stepped out of unimaginable splendor to come...for **them!** Our pride keeps us from God—and everything we really want. And that's why God has vowed to humble the proud because that's sometimes the **only** way our souls can be saved.
 3. It's funny. Jesus came disguised in humility—and yet we sometimes think that God is looking for the winners. The people who've done well. People who seem like they would have something profound to offer. People who've kept themselves healthy, who've achieved, who've tasted success—you know the brilliant people

who can use their brain-power and their talent and reputation and achievement to impress others into Jesus' Kingdom.

-But it doesn't work like that—because, you see, at the foot of the cross, the ground is level.

We can't drag our achievements, all the reasons why we are **somebody** in our world with us. And we have to bow our knees before an Almighty God and admit that we have absolutely nothing to offer. It's very simple. Whatever you do, don't forget--in God's system, **simple is the new smart!**

IV. IT COULD BE VERY SIMPLE

- A. Fascinating, isn't it, that on April Fool's day, we would be talking about what Paul calls the **foolishness of the cross**. The cross, it seems, is God's joke on all the smart people in the winner's circles of the world who think God might be impressed with their wisdom. -But one Sunday, now called **Palm Sunday**, God himself rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, a symbol of a King who comes in peace. Donkeys are dumb-looking, long-eared stubborn animals—not very impressive. Surrounding Jesus were the “nots”—the people who did **not** make it into the winner's circle of that day—just common guys; fishermen, tax collectors—this rag-tag group of followers.

-That day, kids picked up on Who He really was. But the smartest and best people in the world of that day didn't.

- B. Today, a number of you find yourself in the winners circle. Just a word of caution. Remember that God is not at all impressed with what you have or with your accomplishments. Watch your heart. Watch your attitudes—and don't just hang around with others like you. We are called to **humble** ourselves before God. -Maybe you've **never** been among those considered bright, gifted, influential, or super spiritual. You never even got asked to lead in **silent** prayer. That's **good** news. Because, God has chosen to use people **just like you** to change the world. **Simple is the new smart.**