Our Bible reading for today – Colossians 1:9-23

“The Prince and the Pauper”

Some time in most children’s lives they read the classic tale, “The Prince and the Pauper”. It’s an attempt by Mark Twain at historic fiction, first published in 1881. It’s an imagined time in the life of Prince Edward, son of the infamous Henry VIII. In a strange meeting with a poor boy named Tom Canty, his same age and near identical appearance, the boys become friends. They decide on a lark to exchange clothes and pretend they are each other. The ensuing story is all the trouble they get into before the “trick” is revealed. The rest is history (fiction).

The story of Jesus is a true “Prince and the Pauper” saga. Only much more dramatic and infinitely more important! In his great prophecy about the coming Messiah, Isaiah spoke of Him as “a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground”. What did Isaiah mean? Isaiah also spoke of Him earlier in his book. “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” (NIV Isaiah 11:1) (Jesse was the father of King David.)

(Did you ever do family research? It can be interesting and fun. If you want to bore people tell them about your background. I’ll bore you now. My son, one of my sisters and a cousin, have done a lot of looking. Among their findings are that I am descended from Chaucer’s sister, and that for 3 generations my ancestors were clergymen in England. They had very prestigious pulpits in the 1600’s, and one of them had a doctorate from Oxford. They also learned that some of my forebears fought in the Revolutionary Army, and several served in the Civil War – on the wrong side. And I won’t mention what else they have found.)

Many people living in the 1st century, at the time of Jesus’ birth could lay claims to being descendants of Israel greatest king, David. In a little town in Galilee, Nazareth – a poor town with a bad reputation – there were 2 poor people. One was a stone mason or carpenter, Joseph. Another was an unknown poor girl named Mary, and they were pledged to be married. For both – whatever little it meant – they could trace their family to David. For them it meant no pomp, no power, no glory, no wealth, no kingdom, no allegiance, and no subjects. It was only a curiosity. That was meaningless, just a curiosity, no purpose – so they thought. It wouldn’t entitle them to anything. There was no real king in Israel, and there had been none for nearly 600 years. There was no reasonable expectation for any king soon. And certainly not Joseph or any poor carpenter son of his.

But it was truly amazing, from this little family of Mary and Joseph, out of Nazareth, born in little Bethlehem, from among a little oppressed people, from a seemingly dead line of kings – “A tender shoot, a root out of dry ground”, “a shoot …from the stump of Jesse”.

Jesus was the absolute ultimate “Prince and the Pauper”, all in one. He was poor, and heir to the throne of David. He was also “Prince of Peace”. At Christmas, some of the carols of the season celebrate the fact that Jesus left His throne in heaven to become a man. He was God in the flesh. He represented God to us, and then died as our substitute – our Redeemer. Prophecy tells us that He will come again to reign of David’s throne as “King of kings and Lord of lords”! An object of pity? God to be adored and worshiped!

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