

PERSPECTIVES

Mark 11:1-11

Intro

So, today is...Palm Sunday. What passage would you expect to see as one of the lectionary readings? Exactly! Donkey, palms, and shouts of Hosanna: go!

So imagine my surprise when I looked at the available passages...and there was no palm branch to be found!

Instead, what was suggested were 2 whole chapters from the Gospel of Mark that recounted the events of what we know as Holy Week. Two chapters! When I put that on to paper, it ended up being the same length as the sermon.

Exactly: it doesn't fit how we are led to worship.

But the fact that it was suggested caused me look a little differently at what we would hear this morning. So, we will read the verses from Mark that recount the Triumphal Entry, and then we'll read a little further as was suggested by the Lectionary.

Remember, the enthusiasm and excitement that we hear, that we enjoy dwelling in, in regard to Jesus entering Jerusalem, were propelled forward by expectations that were based in human wants and not the movement of God in the world. The scripture reads this way.

Mark 11:1-11

11When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples² and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it.³ If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."'⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it,⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?'⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

11 Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Mark 14:1-11, 32-51

Intro

Jesus has entered into the city. There is a level of buzz that the new king, a Jewish king, who will bring about God's kingdom, is about to claim authority. But if he claims authority, then that means, especially

by the 'there is only so much power to go around' metric that very much exists in many peoples minds, that someone else will lose theirs. The chief priests, and I believe Judas, were responding to this in one way. Jesus' anointment shows us God's way.

My question is this, are we paying attention to how God is still speaking? Or are we so focused on our own perspectives, anticipating God in moving in that way? The scripture reads this way.

Mark 14:1-11, 32-51

14 It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ²for they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'

3 While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.'
³³He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.'
³⁵And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.'
³⁷He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'
³⁹And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹He came a third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.'
⁴⁵So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. ⁴⁶Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to them, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.'
⁵⁰All of them deserted him and fled.

51 A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, ⁵²but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

'Perspectives'

I know, I know: this is not the normal way that we hear scripture on Palm Sunday. We want to be able to celebrate the coming of a king.

The people of Jesus day did as well. We can feel their euphoria. It doesn't even matter to them that the one they think is king is riding on a donkey: they completely ignore that strange visual of royalty riding a service animal out the window and throw their cloaks down on the ground yelling out so that everyone within a few miles is able to hear the ruckus. Their excitement rang so loudly that the chief priests heard it, or at the very least heard about it and the whisper down the lane momentum that was taking place in regard to Jesus ministry. They heard it and knew that if they didn't stop it (which they had been trying to do for years in ways that were relatively quiet) their power was going to be snatched from them, either by the people who were following this new king, or by the Romans who would wipe them out in response to this new political threat that was now shaking the foundations of one of their outposts.

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

The chief priests heard it and they wanted to silence Jesus.

The disciples heard it too and I can only imagine the level of anticipation that they were feeling: the Messiah, the son of God is about to be anointed to his rightful place of authority.

But what is the anointing that takes place?

Regardless of how it should be described, royal would not be one of the adjectival modifiers readily listed. It happens behind closed doors, in a private resident, of someone who is identified as a leper (clearly a no-go in the Jewish culture), by an unnamed woman. These facts leave the disciples, those closest to Jesus, feeling like Jesus is making a mistake, possibly on several levels.

We hear the commentary, 'But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' I'm sure that reason was true, and there is another reason.

Again, the disciples are coming off the high of a king being celebrated as he comes through the city gates of what they consider to be the seat of God, where the Almighty resides, and here is Jesus not only being anointed in a humble and private way, but he follows it up by saying (again) that he is going to die.

What follows this event? Judas betrays Jesus. Some view this as Judas rejecting Jesus' leadership in his life. Others view this as Judas trying to force Jesus hand to claim the roll that so many clearly wanted him to assume (that of an earthly king).

In either case, Judas betrays Jesus and turns him over to the guards of the chief priests under the cover of darkness in a garden by identifying him with...a kiss.

The people saw Jesus as a new King.

The chief priests saw Jesus as a threat.

I believe Judas saw Jesus as not recognizing his potential and power.

An unnamed woman saw Jesus as worthy of praise and anointed him as such.

And that doesn't even touch upon the disciples who went with Jesus to the Garden, only to fall asleep three times even though Jesus kept asking them to stay awake, to stay alert, to stay with him.

How do you see Jesus?

Because the truth of the matter is, your perspective shapes what you see. That is true in regard to all of your life, and it is absolutely true in regard to the one who came through the city gates on the back of a work animal so long ago.

If you look at Jesus as an authority figure who is to be feared...then that is what you will find.

If you look at Jesus as a loving guru who was able to show the world that all they needed was love...then that is what you will find.

If you look at Jesus as a mystery that you've never been able to figure out, so you've given up trying...then that is what you will find.

How do you see him?

That's one of those questions that you need to start working on the answer to. How do you see Jesus? Beginning to recognize and articulate your personal perspective, naming your viewpoint, gives you the opportunity to recognize how it is correct (because it wasn't as if the people during the triumphal entry, the chief priests, and Judas were completely incorrect in their various assessments: portions of their view were true). And then beyond that, and more importantly, how you will need to adjust it in order to embrace the life that is really life through the way that you live the life that you have.

Too often we allow the circumstances of our world to mold and shape our perspective of God, instead of allowing an ever deepening perspective of God to mold and shape how we see the circumstances of our life.

It needs to be the latter.

The former allows us to believe in the power of God, but hesitate when we feel that inner voice calling for us to step beyond our personal comfort zone.

The latter empowers us to be disciples who are able to give of themselves in ways that we didn't think possible.

The former believes God can...but wonders when He will.

The latter knows that God can...and trusts that God is, even when it feels like He can't.

The former sees the authority of God and worries how that authority will affect our lives.

The latter sees the authority of God and trusts that the leading of that Authority will only deepen our appreciation and respect for the Almighty, for the world, and for ourselves.

And that can begin to unfold when we start to unpack the answer to how you see God.

Name it.

And then allow that perspective to grow, develop, and yes, even change by dwelling in God's Word and following through on direction that all of it points toward: love God, love neighbor.

I know, that means we actually need to have at least a basic handle on what is contained in these pages...but we can...and we will, as we allow the presence of God to shape our perspective of how we see the world, of how we see ourselves, of how we see the Almighty, both in our lives, and in the world around us.

Let God shape your perspective. After all, our perspective, no matter how firm it may be, isn't going to ever change who God always was, is, and will be.

After Sermon Prayer

God, we look at the world and what we see is absolutely shaped by our perspective. Too often, as we are reminded of in some very real ways in this morning's passages, this perspective shapes what we expect from You in ways that might not be correct...and could be flat out wrong. Lord, as we enter into this Holy Week in a world that seems increasingly upside down, shake us free of our perspectives so that we might be molded by You. Help us to see ourselves, the world, and yes, You, from a vantage point that is ever closer to Yours. Lord, let it be so. Amen.