

WORSHIP

Sermon | 3.28.2021



Donkey Duty

The Reverend Pen Peery

Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 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. If anyone says to you, “Why are you doing this?” just say this, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.” ’

They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna!



Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

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.

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It is hard for me to believe that this is the second Palm Sunday we've shared in the COVID pandemic. But here we are...

Today begins a journey through the holiest week of the church year. Through the rhythm of this week, we will walk with Jesus from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem – the last meal he would share with his disciples – his betrayal – his death on the cross – and, finally, his resurrection which we will celebrate next Sunday.

On this Sunday last year, when all of this still felt new, Lorenzo and I decided that we would both offer a short sermon – with one of us preaching on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the other of us "making the turn" to preach on Jesus' "passion" – or journey of suffering. Last year, Lorenzo started us off. Today, we are going to switch up the order, and I will be reading the Palm Sunday



text. Listen with me for a word from God from Mark's gospel. I am reading from the 11th chapter, beginning at the first verse.

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There are a lot of things that distinguish Mark from the rest of the gospels. Primarily, Mark is the shortest.

Just 16 chapters from start to finish. No birth narrative. No resurrection appearance. It starts with Jesus' baptism and then moves at a brisk pace all the way through.

Unlike the gospel of John, where Jesus speaks in long, run-on sentences, the dialogue in Mark is spare. Why use 20 words when 10 will do? There's not a lot of description, or elaboration, or emotion...just the facts.

Other gospels tell the story of Palm Sunday with fanfare.

In John – there are great crowds on hand for a grand processional.

In Matthew – the crowds were “very large.”

Luke breaks into hyperbole: if the crowds were silent, “even the stones would shout!”

For Mark – it was less of a parade and more of a thrown-together first-century



flash mob. In fact, Mark never uses the word “crowd.”

In Mark’s account, it is almost as if no one in Jerusalem really noticed that anything was different – Jesus just, kind of, enters the city gates, takes a look around the Temple, and returns to the place where he and the disciples were staying.

Mark spends very little time describing the event that we joyfully replicate year after year with our palm branches and shouts of “Hosanna!” That’s not altogether unusual, because – it’s Mark.

But what is unusual is just how much time Mark spends on describing the details around the preparations for Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem.

Where to go to find the colt.

What to say if someone asks why they are...well...stealing it.

And then, a play-by-play of how it happens.

What the two disciples do.

What they say to the bystanders who ask them why they are making off with someone else’s animal.

How they brought it to Jesus and prepared it for him to ride.



It's strange – especially for Mark – that so much attention would be spent on the mundane details...on the arrangements that had to take place before the main event of Jesus entering Jerusalem.

It's almost as if those details are most important part of the story.

A good friend of mine, and fellow preacher, Becca Gillespie Messman wonders what it must have felt like for the disciples in this story.

You follow Jesus along a journey that takes you from Galilee to Jerusalem. You witness miracles. Healings. You hear Jesus talking about the coming kingdom of God. You gather that you are in the very moment that God is acting in history to save the world – to redeem the people of Israel and beyond – to fulfill the promise of Scripture. And **you** get to be a part! **You** are the witness to these things! And then Jesus – your teacher and Lord – looks at you and says, “Hey – you two: You’ve got donkey duty.”

What a let-down!

What an under-utilization of what I imagine were competent people!

Is that really what discipleship – what following Jesus is all about? Donkey duty!?

Well...yes.

Most of the time...yes.

