

Sermon for Palm Sunday

March 28, 2021

Mark 11: 1-11

Rev. Christine Coy Fohr

Jesus knew just what he was doing. The arrangements that he made for his entry into Jerusalem were so precise, so clear, there can't be any question – this was part of a plan. All four gospels testify to it. All four make a point of sharing this story. And Mark, who is usually the gospel writer who is scant on the details, shares an almost in-depth account, by his standards. Step by step, move by move, Jesus tells the disciples just what to do, just what needs to be done so that he can make this critical entrance into Jerusalem.

First, he tells them, they must go into a village and immediately they will find a colt who has never been ridden. A colt perfect for ceremonial use, according to the Torah. Jesus tells them to untie it and to bring it to him. And, he tells them, if anyone says to you, “why are you doing this”, they are simply to respond, “The Lord needs it.”

So they go, and they do just as Jesus said. And the people who saw them came to them and said, “what are you doing?” and the disciples responded just as Jesus had told them to – “the lord needs it.” And somehow that response was enough, and they allowed these men to take a colt that was not theirs, a ceremonial colt now setting off on its sacred journey. They threw their cloaks on its back and Jesus sat on it, this colt that was probably so small that Jesus' feet dragged on the ground beneath. And, with the disciples, with every detail of his carefully choreographed plans now in place, Jesus entered Jerusalem.

In a story that is only 11 verses long, Mark spends 8 of those talking about Jesus' preparations. Talking about Jesus' meticulous instructions for this critical event in his life. Because he knew – and we, in turn, are invited to know – *this is it*. This is where things turn. This is where a story about a teacher and his followers becomes, quite intentionally, something more. A story about challenging an empire, perhaps. A story about a quiet movement going public. A story about peacefully provoking the powerful. Jesus' careful choreography tell us he knew what he was getting himself into.

And what happened? Did people simply go about their day as yet another pilgrim made his way into Jerusalem?

Most of the people coming to town would have entered on foot. Most would have, but journeying on a colt would not have been unheard of. And many would have been greeted with greenery. Crowds typically did shout blessings on the pilgrims as they entered the city, and often from their place of poverty they would cry to any who would listen “Hosanna”, which literally means, “save us.”

But Jesus' welcome was different. He had set off from the Mount of Olives – the place of kingmakers. And as he entered the gates, as the palms were waved and the Hosanna's were raised, they also lay their cloaks out on the road before him. They lay their cloaks and they cried, “Hosanna!” Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!” They welcomed him like a king. They welcomed him as the heir to David's throne.

Yes, Jesus knew just what he was doing. And, likewise, he knew what those actions would ultimately cost him. He knew that such a triumphal entry would draw attention, that it would raise suspicion. Up until now Jesus had cautioned his disciples, again and again, not to say anything publicly about the great works he had done. Not to share anything about what he had done or what they had seen.

But now, in this week before Passover, Jesus decides to enter Jerusalem with full publicity – to receive the acclaim of the crowds and to appear before the world as if he is fulfilling messianic prophecy. He is willing to go public. And in doing so, in meticulously planning every detail of his arrival and his entry, he knows what he is *ultimately* doing – the fate he is *ultimately* sealing for himself. Where Hosannas will quickly change to Crucify, and this road once paved with cloaks and palms will soon become the path to the cross.

Mark's story ends somewhat anticlimactically. It says that after his entry, he went into the temple, and when he had looked around at everything, he realized it was getting pretty late, and it was probably about time to head back to camp for the night. So, he went with the disciples back out of the city to Bethany.

But all he had planned, every detail he had coordinated, it had been done intentionally. And not just as an act of theater, but as a defiant act whose ultimate end he also knew. The plans of Palm Sunday led to the cross. To Easter, yes, but first...to incredible suffering. But he knew what he was doing.

As we read this story – as we wave our palms and walk, this week, down the Holy Week road – we may look for ourselves in those crowds. We may look for ourselves throwing our cloaks on the road and shouting Hosanna. We may look for ourselves at that final meal and pray that ours were not the voices that cried “crucify”.

But as we wonder what we would have done, let us not forget what Christ did. That when the time was right, he set in motion events that took him from his quiet country ministry to public notoriety. That Jesus, the teacher and healer, knew what he was doing as he set out on the path that day. That he knew the path before him was not a path of royalty, but a path that led to suffering and mockery and abandonment. That the path before him was not the path of a king, but the path of a savior. Jesus knew. And so do we.

So let us wave our palms. Let us shout our Hosannas. Let us worship this one who has come to save us, and as we walk this path with him through this Holy Week, let us dedicate our lives to serving him.