

## Thy Kingdom Came! Mark 11: 1-11

The Bible is truly a unique and incredible book. It is amazing to consider that we can learn so much about God and ourselves from a book that was written to a different culture in a different time and in different languages. The greatest challenge we face in doing that is putting the Scriptures in context with our modern- day lives without sacrificing their eternal truth. One thing we can do is to view them in more familiar surroundings. For instance, if that first Palm Sunday in Palestine were to take place today, it might sound something like this: Now Jesus and His disciples left Sharon PA and headed towards Youngstown for the weeklong celebration at the cathedral. As they reached Campbell, Jesus chose two of his disciples and said to them- Go down the hill into Lowellville and as soon as you get there, I want you to borrow a car. You will recognize it because it is rusty and has a banged- up fender, two missing hubcaps and a cracked windshield. The keys will be in the ignition, and if anyone asks why you are taking it just tell them that Jesus needs it and we will return it with a full tank of gas after He is done with it.

Now imagine the disciple's reaction. Jesus, you are the Son of God. You cannot be seen in an old beater like that. And what if someone thinks we are trying to steal it? Maybe Lazarus would let you use his SUV. Before you get too critical of the disciples, ask yourself what you would do if your pastor asked you to do something like that. Or even better ask yourself how you would react if it was your car the 2 strangers had come to borrow.

The events of that first Palm Sunday are much like our American Independence Day parades that take place on July 4<sup>th</sup>. Folks dress in red, white, and blue, gather on Main Street in small towns and large cities across the fruited plain, and eagerly await the long procession of fire trucks, marching bands and antique automobiles. Adults and children alike wave their flags and scurry to retrieve Tootsie Rolls and other pieces of cheap candy tossed by those marching in the parade. A special place of honor is reserved for the Grand Marshall, and he or she is surrounded by local dignitaries as they ride on the best decorated float or fanciest car in the procession.

It is a time for celebrating and a time for remembering, as we honor those men and women who gave of themselves to secure and maintain our nation's freedom. Perhaps you can recognize some of the parallels to the Palm Sunday Parade in Jerusalem. Flags and palm branches, a king and a grand marshal, a diverse mixture of politicians, community leaders and common folk celebrating freedom, perhaps failing to deeply appreciate the sacrifice involved.

There is one stark difference. Our Independence Day parades celebrate events of the past that secured our freedom, from the Revolutionary War to modern day conflicts in the Middle East, while those that shouted Hosanna on that first Palm Sunday were looking ahead to their freedom from secular rule. It was something that God promised to their ancestors long ago but was yet to be fulfilled. And now, it seemed that the time for waiting was finally coming to an end. The signs were all there. Mark 1:22 -they witnessed the powerful way in which Jesus taught, not as the Scribes but as one with authority. They watched in amazement as demons were cast out, the lame walked, the blind gained their sight and the dead received life. They believed the long-awaited Messiah was in their midst.

And the fact that Jesus had sent two of them ahead to borrow a donkey helped confirm that their hopes were right. Long ago the prophet Zechariah 9:9 foretold their king would come, riding on the foal of a donkey. Jesus didn't choose a white horse or a fancy Corvette for his ride into town, but a lowly beast of burden. This Jesus had to be the one the prophets spoke about, the one who would finally make things right, the one who would bring justice to a world that so desperately needed it.

Jesus didn't stop them from waving their palm branches or silence their shouts of Hosanna, save now. The fact of the matter is that He was worthy of their praise, and they were right to celebrate the coming of the Messiah who would change the world forever. We know from verse 10 that the crowd recognized Jesus to be not another prophet but the one who would usher in the long-awaited kingdom of David. Jesus heard their shouts of hosanna, and at the same time recognized their fickleness. Perhaps He even recognized the faces of those who would shout "crucify him" just a few days later.

Notice what Jesus did when He arrived in Jerusalem. When the parade was over, He didn't go to the mayor's house or the bishop's house or the best restaurant in town for a special meal, but instead headed straight for the temple. It was a large complex, and He chose not to go into the inner sanctuary but to observe all that was happening in and around the temple courts. Verse 11 tells us that "He had looked around at all things". Can you imagine what He saw when He got there? We can only hope it was people worshipping and praying in preparation for the Passover, people cleaning the windows and the kitchen, sweeping the carpets, waxing the floors, and decorating the altar in anticipation of the holiest celebration of the year. Perhaps He did see some of those things.

Mark doesn't tell us what He did see, but apparently all that He observed wasn't good. The other Gospel writers reveal that Jesus noticed the money changers tables set up, ready to be filled with sacrificial offerings and coin boxes. Perhaps there were signs already posted- spotless lambs 16 shekels, doves only 2 mynahs. Do you wonder if He saw people using their power and influence to gain the best seats at the Seder meal table, or saw others looking down their nose on those whose sacrificial offerings were a dove instead of a lamb? Maybe He noticed some who wanted nothing to do with the Passover celebration and heard their complaints about the traffic and the noise. Perhaps He saw those who told themselves that religion was for weak people and those too stupid to know better. Maybe He saw those who were preparing their own celebration, and if they wanted to roast a ham no one had better dare tell them no.

Jesus saw the good as well as the bad, and we can't help but wonder if His eyes wandered eastward to the hill named Golgotha. It was known as the place of the skull, located just outside the city gates, and it was the place where He knew He would be lifted up on a cross for the world to see. Those who once shouted praises of Hosanna, Hosanna in hopeful expectation would soon be yelling crucify him, crucify him in anger and bitter disappointment. One day they were shouting save us, and just hours later they were shouting kill Him. What in the world happened?

The crowds were angry and disappointed because they failed to recognize the nature of the coming kingdom that Jesus spent so much time talking about. They were expecting heaven on earth and for Jesus to take care of all the details and make it happen. They were content to sit back and wait for the kingdom to come and when things didn't move fast enough, they got angry. They had heard Jesus say over and over again, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. They heard the first part loud and clear but failed to grasp the significance of the latter. Instead of thy kingdom come it was my kingdom come, instead of thy will be done it was my will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

What in the world happened? To put it in modern context once again, a virus happened, a heart attack happened, a cancer happened, an accident happened, some elections happened. Today Jesus doesn't see moneychangers but His Holy church being turned into a giant virtual marketplace and a forum to debate unholy social issues of the day. He sees people taking glory in division and setting one group against another, He sees His followers suffering scorn and ridicule for the sin of upholding basic Biblical values and moral principles that are thousands of years old. Is this what Jesus meant when He said the kingdom was in our midst? Is this what His kingdom, which really means His church, is supposed to look like? The answer to both questions is no, and we can't blame Jesus. His kingdom came. The problem is that we are still trying to turn it into our kingdom, which is exactly why Jesus said repent and believe in the Gospel.

So perhaps we shouldn't be too hard on those who yelled crucify him. It is impossible to know how we would have responded if we were there on that first Good Friday morning. So, as we pray and meditate this week, it would be good to thank God that by His grace we are spared the opportunity to yell crucify him. It will be good to thank Him for giving us the grace to shout hosanna, even when it is so difficult to do so. So, let us drown out the voices of those who shout crucify Him. They may not use those words but like Judas their actions speak for themselves. Let us never forget that Jesus gave his life for those sins and more. It is during these times of trouble that we will need to shout hosanna even louder. Hosanna, save us now, hosanna. Amen.