

The Lord Comes to His Temple Mark 11:1-11 (with a debt to Mark: A Commentary by M. Eugene Boring:)

The sermon this morning is about three things:

1. What we see Jesus doing
2. How his disciples and the crowds respond
3. What does this teach us about following Jesus today?

So what do we see Jesus doing?

We see Jesus doing something that has been hinted at since Mark's opening verse.

Mark begins his gospel with these words from Malachi:

He says Isaiah, but really it is Malachi:

"See I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way..." Mark 1:2

Any time there is a quote from the Old Testament, it is only a snippet of a larger passage.

Here is a bit more from Malachi 3:

¹ "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

Jesus, the Lord, is coming to his temple. In Mark he has never been to Jerusalem or the temple before. Jesus is from Galilee in the north.

Map.

Jesus is in charge. He gives clear directions to his disciples and predicts events in advance. It must have been a relief to his disciples to get clear, straightforward directions. I'll bet they got goose bumps when it all happened just as Jesus had said it would.

There's kind of a funny line hidden in the story. When Jesus tells them what to say if they are challenged by the donkey's owners, he says, "tell them **"it's Lord"** has need of it and will return it **immediately**. So Jesus is Lord even of donkeys.

Jesus is in charge. Pilgrims who traveled to Jerusalem for religious festivals and for worship always came on foot. Jesus always walked everywhere. Riding was a symbol of royal authority.

A colt that had never been ridden before had a special quality, a sacral or royal quality.

Jesus rides an unbroken animal, untrained. It shows his authority.

The colt is draped with cloaks, so that it becomes a sort of throne.

The crowds make a "red carpet" by throwing off their cloaks in front of the donkey. It's a symbolic act. Last week we saw a blind beggar throw off his cloak. It means leaving your old life and offering yourself to Jesus. That's what these people are doing on the road outside Jerusalem.

Jesus is coming with authority.

He is also arriving as a victorious king.

That is why the songs the people sing are perfect.

“Hosanna!

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

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

These are lines from Psalm 118, the song of the victorious king.

In that song the king from David’s family celebrates that God has given him victory and comes to the temple and asks the gatekeepers to open the gates for him.

Once inside, the congregation joins him in thanksgiving and the group of priests says: “From the house of the Lord, we bless you”.

Here’s a bit more of that song. It is easy to imagine King David returning from battle to excited crowds. Kids out of school for the day, people taking the afternoon off, seniors who helped each other, because no one would miss the king’s coming home.

And it is easy to hear how it fits so well with Jesus, coming in victory

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.

- ²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.
- ²² The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
- ²³ the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- ²⁴ This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
- ²⁵ O LORD, save us;
O LORD, grant us success.
- ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you. ^[a]
- ²⁷ The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine upon us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up ^[b] to the horns of the altar.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem victorious: He has set people free from demons, he has set people free from sin, has healed the lame, deaf, mute and blind. He has fed the crowds and controlled the sea.

The rabbis taught that these were the things that the Messiah, the saviour would do.

Those were Hosanna victories.

There is an ominous note here though. (like the theme from Jaws very softly in the background)

Jesus goes into the city and goes straight to the temple to inspect it. He's looking for a place that helps people to connect with God. He wants to find a

quiet place where anybody can come in and pray and offer their sacrifices and their lives to God. Instead, he will find a noisy market run by the priests.

“No pay, no pray.”

Given all we have seen Jesus do in this gospel we expect a word.....”immediately.....”, instead, because it was already late he left, and went back to Bethany with the twelve. But he **will** be back.

He will be back and he will trigger a chain of events that will mean judgment on the temple. He will trigger a chain of events that will mean he himself will take the judgment on himself on the cross and he himself will become the new temple. Jesus will become **the meeting place** for God and his people. We don't have pilgrimages in the Christian faith because it is through Jesus, by praying in his name that we come to God for mercy and grace.

So how does this story help us as followers of Jesus? How does it help Melanie and Anthony to raise Grady to know and love and follow Jesus?

I would like to suggest five ways:

1. What we see Jesus do says, “Jesus is strong”. Jesus is powerful. He can deal with anything. He is not a victim. Jesus is in charge, even as he lays down his life. Trust him. The only way to teach our children to trust Jesus is by trusting him ourselves.

2. We can understand Jesus and know him more. To know Jesus is to respect him. Not just because he can ride an untrained donkey.... (though that is something) but because, even though it is only hinted at here... he **will not** put up with injustice. He will not put up with those who prevent the poor from worshiping.

3. The joy on the road is contagious. Do you find that it is? Doesn't it make you wish in a way that you were there along the road? We can still go there by singing to Jesus, as we have done together. The joy of worship is contagious when it comes from our hearts. When his dad died, our friend Jonathan had a lot to say. But one of his best memories of his dad Rinus was the memory of standing beside him in church as he "belted out" songs of praise. I remember the same experience standing beside my dad. A good friend of ours recently said that she knew she had become a follower of Jesus when she realized that she really meant the songs she was singing in church. Throw off your cloak, leave your old life and follow Jesus.

4. They say "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David". What they are hoping for is that one day all people everywhere will trust in Jesus and live like Jesus teaches us to do. On that day, as Dame Julian said so long ago, "All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well." I don't know how it is for you, but I find so much of the news to be discouraging, even depressing sometimes. And sometimes I get discouraged with myself.

The song on the road is a song of hope. Jesus' kingdom has come and is coming. And one day all will be well. We will be fully at peace. Inside and out. The hungry and starving will be fed. Countries will no longer spend themselves into the ground on weapons and death and destruction. Instead, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess and every hand will share because Jesus Christ is the Lord.

5. The writer of Hebrews says that it was hopeful joy that gave Jesus the courage to die for us on the cross. It was for the joy ahead of him that he went back into town the next day to do the dirty, necessary work. The kingdom will come as Jesus lays down his life. The shouts of Hosanna may have given Jesus more courage to give his life for us.

The kingdom of Jesus **takes shape** as we lay down **our lives**. As we give ourselves, our money, our energy, our time to Jesus by giving it to others. There is a real danger in this time of economic crisis that the wealthy of the world will become too nervous to give. There is a real danger that out of fear of having to tighten our belts we will ignore those who are dying of hunger. The joy of this scene can give us the courage to throw off our cloaks and follow, and so lead our children to do the same.

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen. (pastor John Luth, Sunday April 5, 2009)