

TEXT: Mark 11.1-11

TOPIC: After locating a colt, Jesus rides into Jerusalem to people shouting “Hosanna” or “save (me) us now.”

SUBJECT: It’s unsettling to think we cheer the oppressors or play victims; all that’s necessary is surrender to God.

TITLE: Two Different Journeys

Mark 11:1-11 unsettled me this week. That’s never happened with this passage before.

It was unsettling because every one of us has a choice about how we enter Jerusalem. In this case, Jerusalem, is the center of our faith. Every one of us has a choice. Every one of us.

And the choice not only says something about us; it says much about our relationship with God.

Every one of us has the choice between two journeys into Jerusalem and it’s easy to confuse what they are; they are not what we think. It doesn’t matter whether we find ourselves in the crowd waiving palms and yelling “Hosanna” to Jesus or throwing confetti at Pilate and the Roman guard. In either instance, if all we are ... are faces in the crowd, we are merely stuck by a faith that is what we want it to be. The second way is altogether different.

If we are only faces in the crowd, good chance we don’t see or we are unseen – to others and to ourselves. When we are only faces in the crowd unseen to others and to ourselves, it’s a set-up and set-ups always have the same outcome: Lives unlived that end in death rather than death that brings about lives worth living.

The second way makes it possible to experience the difference. But first, let’s pray.

PRAYER

One of the most intriguing studies regarding Palm Sunday is the one Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan did early this century. They suggested that the procession from the east took Jesus from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem while the second procession brought Pontius Pilate and the Roman guard into town from the west because the Passover was near

and people traveled from miles away for the commemoration, so there was a need for law and order.

The contrast of the processions has captivated me since I first learned of it. The Roman procession from the west is about power, empire, and control, so people know they were not free of an empire that always ready, willing, and waiting to strike back.

The procession from the east featured a donkey colt, cloaks and palm branches along the road of the one coming in the name of the Lord quietly, proclaiming the peaceful reign of God contrasted with the crowds shouting “Hosanna!” from people desperate for self-interests. Know how I know that? The word “Hosanna” means “save us now.” Say that with me: Save us now! The cry to *save us now* is no different than the cry to be freed from Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian or Greek oppression or any other oppressors throughout history. Today, some cry to be saved from illusion, false identity, addiction, sin, ego or even from themselves. Some even cry to be saved from political oppression, dictatorships and, even, democracy.

I find that distressing, too.

What I find distressing from our gospel lesson is when those who cry “Hosanna” don’t like what they’re seeing, their chant goes from “Hosanna” to “crucify!” For instance, our task is no different from Bartimaeus’ task: to see those who are invisible and to see what’s become invisible within ourselves. What distresses me is thinking our resistance means doing the same thing over and over again will bring about different results when Jesus is all about healing opportunities that facilitate healthy change.

I’m not sure I ever associated with the Hosanna bunch or the Roman bunch, but I probably associated with both because they’re one and the same; maybe that’s the case for

you; I don't know. Whether you're waiving palms, shouting Hosanna or cheering loyalty to an empire that always strikes back, the outcome is the same. Jesus invites us to another way altogether; that other way is the second journey where we finally start to see what no one else sees. The second journey focuses on solutions rather than problems. The second journey invites us to come face to face with our world.

Lent and Holy Week are about facing what's hardened in our lives and our hearts. Hard questions. Hard answers. Hard challenges. Hard situations. Too often I've been passive about the parades because I'd make them what I want; the real task is to be what God wants. Jesus is pretty clear that aligning with power isn't aligning with God, and aligning with God isn't about aligning with power.

Maybe it's time to recount the journey of a baptism that cleanses us like the blood of the one who died on the cross. Maybe it's time to think about the journey of trusting the one who goes with us and is with us always. Maybe it's time to think about how important the law and grace are to our journey. Maybe it's important to think of where God is taking us on the journey beyond a fixed image or a fixed time. Maybe wrestling with the two journeys should have us ask which cross we are willing to bear. Palm Sunday has a way of meeting us with a culmination of the season without realizing Palm Sunday is part of the season that takes us from life to death and from death to life.

Ultimately, the second journey is about taking up our cross to follow. The second journey is about glorifying God like Jesus did. Just as Jesus had to glorify God, so do we. The second journey should have us face our own holy weeks. The second journey should guide us toward our own crucifixions and resurrections. The second journey should force us to ask

ourselves what would happen if we glorified God right now. The second journey has to do with remembering what Jesus said – that glorifying God is not about my will or your will, but thy will. Thy will be done, Jesus said. *Thy will be done*. We pray it often, but do we do it often? Thy will be done.

Ultimately, the second journey is about being deeply troubled rather than asking God to save us from the forces which rule over us or aligning with power that only falsely exists. To me, the second journey is about being troubled to the point I ask God to take away whatever I have let get in the way of seeing what God is doing in my life. I'd hope and pray that the second journey, then, would have us align ourselves and our lives with the light that came into the world and the light the darkness never could put out.

Jesus' procession represented the peaceful nature of the reign of God; so, should ours even when it goes against human nature. It's up to us to let Jesus' commitment be our commitment forcing us to go beyond a faith that is about surviving to a faith that has us march toward a death that brings life, so we have lives resurrected from death.

In Jesus, God has far more in store for every one of our journeys than we can possibly have for ourselves. It may be unsettling to discover what that is, but don't you think it's more unsettling not to? I certainly do!

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.