

Be the One  
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Mark 11:1-11  
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Prayer

God of Amazing Grace, we remember again how Jesus  
Trotted down the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey,  
Not quite what we expected honestly.  
Such a vision doesn't look like the power we might try to emulate.  
Such wisdom makes no sense to us.  
We are happy to join the crowd, waving branches,  
But not so sure we want to follow  
    into the temple courts  
    into the upper room  
    into the Garden of Gethsemane  
    to the foot of the cross.  
Loving God, forgive our false assumptions.

Clarify our clouded vision.  
Let us relax into the foolishness of your love, your grace. Amen.

SERMON

Today we celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

A story we know well—a borrowed and unblemished colt, enthusiastic crowds shouting and waving palm branches to catch his attention, cloaks spread like a carpet upon the road, this story has center stage in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

This is rare indeed. My colleague, Nancy Taylor, is right in saying: “Making the cut in all four gospels—well, that's a big biblical deal.” Christmas didn't make it into all four gospels. Two of the gospels make no mention of the pregnant Mary for whom there was no room in the inn, or the shepherds watching their flocks by night or the angels or the star or the wise men or even the babe in the manger. Christmas only makes the cut in two gospels.

The Lord's Prayer didn't make it into all four gospels. The prayer that Jesus taught his followers, the prayer the church has recited over the course of more than two millennia—the prayer recited alike in Kenyan huts and European cathedrals, recited by Catholic and Orthodox, by Protestant and Pentecostal—even Jesus' own prayer—isn't in all four gospels. It only made the cut in two.

The parable of the Good Samaritan and the parable of the Prodigal Son appear in but one gospel.

The Beatitudes—blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are the meek, blessed are the poor—made it into only two gospels.

But, the Palm Sunday story—the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem—this story has pride of place in all

four gospels.

And yet, to be perfectly honest, I have always had trouble embracing our celebration of Palm Sunday. It's not the story per se, who doesn't like a parade? Who doesn't love the re-enactment every year when we try to imagine the scene? What it might have been like to be there, in the moment, shouting, "Hosanna!"

No, I wrestle with this holy day of the church every year because, well, I just can't stop thinking about the rest of the story of Holy Week, and the fact that very soon the need for enthusiastic shouts of support will be left for the very stones themselves. The Trial before Pilate looms, just around the corner, like an inescapable nightmare when our Jesus stood alone. No shouts of Hosanna. No support when he needed it most.

So, Palm Sunday, for me, is like reading a familiar novel and attempting to enjoy the lovely account of a joyous throng living into the best of themselves in one chapter while trying to get out of my head how this celebration becomes desertion and denial and torture and tragedy in the next chapter.

When you hear the joy-filled shouts of the crowd welcoming Jesus into the Holy City of Jerusalem do you, as I do, find yourself wondering *what happened?* Do you find it hard to accept their enthusiastic waving of branches, and the deliberate destruction of good clothing as authentic signs of embrace when viewed through the shadow of Maundy Thursday?

Do these words of the Roddy Hamilton resonate with you?

Did the stones know  
they would soon have to shout 'Hosanna'  
because those who had first shouted it  
would soon be shouting 'Crucify'?

Did Jesus know  
that those who followed in this fickle crowd  
would soon turn their backs  
on the only hope they had  
Did Jesus tell the stones  
that they would be needed to shout  
for they alone knew  
the secret of tombstones

Do we know?  
Do we know when to shout  
and when to hold silence  
as the savior struggles for love  
and love struggles with him

I do struggle with knowing what I know about the events of that fateful week. Yes, I realize that the jubilant crowds in the street waving palms and shouting, "Hosanna," were most likely very different from the ones who cried, "crucify him," at the courthouse. That angry crowd is believed to be a much smaller band of Zionist followers of their leader Barabbas. That angry crowd could have cared less about Jesus and his message of power and mercy that was not of this world. They wanted deliverance from Rome; PLAIN AND SIMPLE.

Yet, I also think it is equally likely that the change in tone at this later gathering was reflective of a change in the heart of the very crowd that had lauded him earlier. It is easier to shout Hosannas in the brightness of day, amongst an enthusiastic crowd, when all seems right and good. Pushing back against the very real threat of power and injustice in the dark of night, well, that is far more challenging.

It is hard to be the one who stands up and shouts what needs to be heard, the one who does what must be done during the shadow times when life is on the line. So, perhaps, what I struggle with is the disturbing question, who would I have been in this part of the story? Who would I have been in the shadow of Pilate's courts? Do you ever wonder the same?

I remember a video of an experiment during my undergraduate work in Psychology that highlighted this very human characteristic. In this scientific investigation done on the streets of California, a man was asked to walk along a busy sidewalk and then suddenly fall to the side and lay motionless. They did this experiment several times at sites around the city. The results were the same.

At first, the startled pedestrians would slow down, but then quickly walk on, out of fear perhaps? This would go on for some period of time—a slower pace, a quick observation, and then rapid strides away. Until... until one person stopped and offered care to the stricken man. THEN, everyone stopped! Everyone!

It is hard to be THE ONE.

And yet, dear friends, that is exactly what our faith is calling us to be.

The one who cares. The one who overcomes fear. The one who stops. The one who reaches out. The one who sets the example. The one who turns the tide.

Can we do it? More to the point... it is at this time of the year with a palm branch in our hand, when we are reminded to ask ourselves... Can I do it? Can each ONE of us do it?

Please don't give into the temptation. Don't listen to the voice of discouragement and dismay—its constant whisperings that surely you cannot be the one who makes the difference. I will remind you that the Bible is filled with revered leaders who believed that God chose the wrong person.

In his book, *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference*, Desmond Tutu offers these encouraging and challenging words:

“My beloved... You are not defined by what you did not achieve.  
Your worth is not determined by success.  
You were priceless before you drew your first breath,  
Beautiful before dress or artifice,  
Good at the core.

And now is time for unveiling the goodness that is hidden behind the fear of failing.  
You shout down your impulse to kindness in case it is shunned,  
You suck in your smile,  
You smother your laughter,  
You hold back the hand that would help.  
You crush your indignation  
When you see people wronged or in pain

In case all you can do is not enough,  
In case you cannot soothe the searing,  
In case you cannot make it right.  
What does it matter if you do not make it right?  
What does it matter that your efforts move no mountains?  
It matters not at all.  
It only matters that you push back the veil to let your goodness shine through.  
It only matters that you live as I have made you.  
It only matters that you are made for me,  
Made like me, Made for goodness.”

Friends, it's our turn now, our turn to show the world what God looks like, to show the world what love looks like, to show the world what mercy looks like. What it looks like to love our enemies, AND not only our enemies, BUT the immigrant and the alien, the stranger, and the unnamed others, that we often do not see, even though they are right in front of us.

Is it possible?

It is, if we never lose sight of this reality—that we are part of a tradition that lives into the inspired hope-filled light of Easter morn, and through God’s grace turns the hopeless hate-filled betrayal of Good Friday into the promise of all our bright tomorrows.

So, let each of us...  
Be the one who is present  
Be the one who will not deny  
Be the one who will not run away  
Be the one who bears witness to suffering

As we enter this most holy of weeks, let each of us, through God’s guidance and grace, be of good courage and Be the One.

For make no mistake, there has never been a greater time of need.

Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at 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.