

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
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April 5, 2009

Palm and Passion Sunday

Mark 11:1-11

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² 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. ³If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹¹Then 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.

Mark 15:25-39

²⁵It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³²Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

³³When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

“Just One of the Crowd”

Mark 11:9 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!"

I remember the anticipation and excitement. It would build all day long. We just waited and waited with such compounding pleasure and delight. When, oh when would the time come that we could go down there? One could hear the sounds of delight. The clanging of bells, the sounds of people making their way closer and closer to the event, ah, it was oh so stirring.

It was almost agony to have to wait and not be able to just run on down there to where the action was happening. What was so exciting? This happened only once a year, and it was to our young lives the ultimate in fun. Yes, it was the annual carnival downtown on the two blocks of main street. It just did not get better than this.

We just loved it. Riding the rides. Watching people play the little games. Getting cotton candy. Our parents were very restrictive on what they let us do and how much money they spent on us. At the time we did not even realize those were limitations; we experienced it as extravagance. It was grand. And we loved it.

This carnival atmosphere is what was happening that morning as Jesus put into play his plan to enter Jerusalem. It was bells, lights, music, and a "wow what a ride" event. At the time this was taking place it was the festival of the Passover. It was a time when Roman security was at level orange. There were many who would have made the pilgrimage in order to come to Jerusalem for Passover. With all those extra people Home Land Security Rome style was paying attention to what was going on.

Jesus had grown in popularity. His name was now recognized and people loved him. When he spoke they were in awe; the things he did

were amazing. He had made Lazarus rise from the dead. He had made the blind man see. You don't keep quiet about events like that—they served to spread his reputation and increase his fame. He had fans and they loved him.

They also had expectations of him. They expected that he was headed for great things. They expected that he would really become something and they were glad to be a part of that. They were tired of Roman occupation and Roman dictatorship and they longed for the day when they would be delivered from the tyranny of such reign. Like their ancestors of old in Egypt, they had confidence that one day God would send an “anointed one” who would lead them to freedom.

That anointed one, the Messiah, would once again claim Jerusalem for God's people and the kind of order they longed for would be restored and made better to the point that it would be unlike anything they had ever known. God would send that Savior of the Nation. This Jesus was just the sort of a person who could be the very power that they were looking for.

Like us when threatened, they thought they knew what the perfect fix looked like. And to them that fix looked like fixing those who were doing the threatening. They wanted immediate results and they turned to power to look for those results. The dynamic was power versus power.

Anyone who can raise someone from the dead, anyone who can make the blind see, anyone who can speak so powerfully about the coming kingdom of God—hey, that one must be the one who could really and truly by means of power and might take over and fix this all for them. Oh, they were in love with Jesus. They thought he was great.

They did—they thought he was all it. So, when they heard he was coming into town there was nothing but excitement happening. Where

was he coming from—from the side of the city near the Mount of Olives—at Bethphage and Bethany. There was mounting excitement.

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And then there is Jesus—this is a calculated move on his part. He does not silently plan to enter the city. He plans to enter in a calculated way. He is the one who tells the disciples to go and get the colt that is in the city. There is a plan here that is being worked. This is not accident. There was some pre-planning that has gone into this in order to make the details come together.

There was subtle and not so subtle meaning going on here. It was common for a warrior to bring together a parade and come into the city as a mounted rider. It is the animal that is of interest here. To make your way into the city on a colt was symbolic. The colt was viewed as the animal of peace. It was not the warrior's animal. Instead, Jesus was making his way into the city mounted on the animal of peace. Hardly a warrior's symbol, and hardly the statement of someone who would politically overthrow any regime.

Yet, this was a political scene. It was a political move. It was an attention getter. There is also the detail of what happened. And you and I know well the detail of the palm branches being cut down and waved at him, but it is that other detail that is of interest. They took their cloaks and coats off and spread them on the road. That was a move that is lost on us.

To remove ones coat or cloak and spread it on the ground for Jesus to pass by was a treasonous move. It would have been viewed as pledging allegiance to Jesus over Rome. This was not lost on those who were in charge of city security. Nor was it lost on those who were in a semi-

comfortable relationship with Rome, namely the leaders of the institutional church.

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So you have the crowds going wild. They loved Jesus. He had it going on—they liked what they heard and saw and longed for. He was their man. And so they shouted it out and proclaimed him as the blessed one of God. “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!”

You could not have stopped the crowd. They loved him. They just loved him. It was like Woodstock in the 60’s and Jesus was their rock star. They could not have done anything else but yell and scream and strip their clothes off. They were in love with him. It was a Beatles like devotion and fame that we saw in the 60’s—they just loved him.

The carnival was happening and they were oh so into it. You could not have asked for it to be better—it was as good as it gets!

What a crowd! But, but....what kind of love was it? What kind of love did they have for him?

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Mark 15:25-30 ***It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!”***

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You see, not even a week passes before that rock star love turns to “you did not play this song the way we wanted it.” It turns. They turn. The whole of the crowd has shifted now. Who is left? Only a few women who cling to him until the end and beyond the end—they are all that is left.

The rest of the crowd, where are they? They are gone. They have changed their story. They are whistling a different tune. It’s all different now. Completely different and utterly changed—what has happened to the rock star Jesus that they loved so much?

It did not come together like they planned. That crowd moved. They judged. Oh sure, ultimately it was the Roman government who did the deed and the institutional church had their dirty hands in it too, but the crowds who only a hand of days previous were going crazy were now crazed with insults.

The Gospel of Mark is very clear here. They crucified him. And when they did it the crowds were not silent in shock—they were mocking of him. They had plenty to say and none of it was complimentary. They turned mean. They turned on him—they used his words against him. “He said he could destroy the temple and build it back up in three days—okay, then save yourself and come down from the cross...ha!”

It was the crowd and the chief priests and the scribes and even those crucified with him. Mark has both those crucified with Jesus mock him—he wants us to get it clear here that the crowd who had loved him on the weekend were against him by the end of the week. It had all changed.

The love they had at the carnival was now a cursing at the crucifixion. Oh did you hear that? The love they had at the carnival was now a cursing at the crucifixion. For the crowd this had not worked out the way they had wanted it to work out. They knew what they wanted

out of their Jesus and he had not turned out to be that, so they turned on him.

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It is the crowd. It is the crowd that we are like. And you say, “Oh preacher, you could not be more wrong—I would never treat my Jesus that way.” Neither would the twelve; neither would Peter—never would they have thought they would turn their backs on him. But when their backs got against the wall....oh then, oh then... it happened.

It happened. It happened to Peter. It happened to Judas. It happened to the 12. It happened to the crowd. It happened. That superficial love—it happened and it happens all the time. It is the love that we have. It is the kind of love with which we love. It is the love that never says it out loud but knows it in the heart, “I will love you so long as you....”

“I will love you so long as you...” ...as you do what I want. ...as you make this happen for me. ...as you act and be the person I want you to be. Oh yes, “I will love you as long as you...” ...are the person I want you to be. “I will love you as long as....”

It is the “as long as” that makes it superficial. It is that “as long as” that makes us just one of the crowd. It is that “as long as” that allows the hosannas to turn into humiliation. It is that “as long as” that becomes seen when we are willing to break our relationship with each other or find a new rock star more to our liking than the one whose song we no longer want to sing.

“I will love you so long as you...” “I will love you as long as...” It makes us just one of the crowd.

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Yet God....God is not one of the crowd. God's love is not superficial. And that is what Mark is showing us here. That is what we are to get. Not the horror of how they turned on him and how we can do that too even as we do that with each other—as horrible as that is—there is more here.

This superficial love we know is met by the cosmic God. Something mighty rightfully powerful is happening here. This is a cosmic occurrence. Mark gives us the detail. At three o'clock in the afternoon Jesus shouts and dies. He shouts and dies. I've been with plenty of people who die—they never shout before they die. Maybe in the movies, but not in real life. I know about crucifixion and it was in essence asphyxiation. The respirations would have slowed, he would have lost ability to talk, and eventually he would have died long after conscious communication would have been finished.

But Mark is clear here—Jesus shouts. What is that the last gasp of? Something cosmic is happening here. The curtain of the temple is torn in two at the same time. What is that about? Something cosmic is happening here. It is from high noon until three o'clock in the afternoon and darkness covers the land. What is that about? Something cosmic is happening here!

It is God! It is God! It is God's kind of love reaching all the way out and all the way down to us in the bloody shouting out dying and dead body of Jesus. It is that God who is love who has this kind of love that is not superficial.

It is no accident that Jesus dies. We are to get it and we are to get it clear that this love of God is so powerful, so enduring, so real, and so for us that even death cannot take it away. There is nothing that can stop it or snatch it out of our hands. Nothing.

The cross is the cosmic moment in which we see the reality of God's love contrasted with our love. We might be just one of the crowd—but this God of ours is hardly that. This God of ours loves us with a love that does not stop. This God of ours loves us with a love that never dies! This is no carnival this is Good News—“nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!” Not even death....Amen.