

Palm Sunday 2021 (Mark 11:1-11)

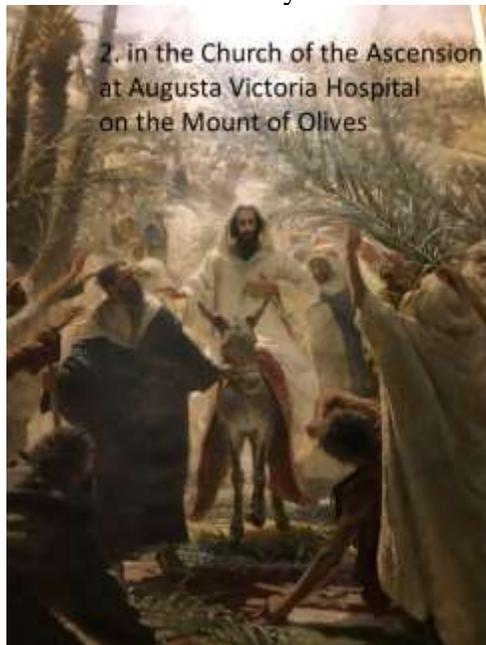


So I have some questions. You can reflect on your own, or type comments.

To put you in place as you start to consider the questions, here's a picture (1) on the Mount of Olives near Bethany looking toward Jerusalem. It's about a mile to the golden Dome of the Rock, the location where the temple was.

This is where Jesus was arriving. He had been out in the boonies, the wilderness and countryside, with rural folks. Today marks his first arrival in the big city of Jerusalem, the religious center, the capital, the seat of power.

So, to start pausing for questions: How do you think those big powers would feel about this rural superstar Jesus? How might the crowds of his followers be treated by the urban elites?



2. We notice the shouts of hosanna. Hosanna is a Hebrew term that means “save us,” as Intern Lisa had in our opening litany.

So: What did those crowds of people want to be saved from? What makes you cry Hosanna, save us? How do we expect Jesus to respond? How is this country bumpkin perched on a pony coming to the capital going to liberate you from oppressions?



3. The commandeering of the donkey—or actually horse, as Mark's version just says colt—goes through more than half the verses of this reading.

So: What's the big deal and why so much detail? Is it to show Jesus had a plan? What about the phrase, “Its master needs it;” does the horse know Jesus is its master?

And we usually picture it as a humble contrast to a warhorse, but Mark just says “colt, horse.” Not

so much gentle and calm, Mark's depictions of Jesus would typically be more intense.

So what image or attitude is Jesus trying to capture with this action?



4. It goes from the detail of the horse to saying people spread their clothes in front of Jesus (as well as leaves from the field, like straw—not palms or branches; palms are actually mentioned only in John). Anyway: the only other time it happens in the Bible that people lay down their clothes like this is in 2nd Kings (9:13) at the start of a coup, where a new king is proclaimed who will be described as a maniac (9:20) as he goes to kill the other king and take over.

So: How does it strike you if the crowds were expecting Jesus to lead a maniacal insurrection? How does that make you feel about joining in with your palm branches today?



5. The crowds associate Jesus with “the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.” David had been a fierce fighter and a clever general, ruthless in expanding territory and getting what he wanted. Their greatest military leader had been in power 1000 years before this, and they’re still looking for one like him.

So: Is that Jesus? Or will Jesus prove to be the opposite of the lineage of King David?



6. Back to that term hosanna: besides a plea for salvation, it was also used for praising royalty, like the English phrase “God save the king.” This king Jesus is determined not to be saved, though.

So: Do you think Jesus knew while riding into town that he’d be killed this week? How would the crowds have reacted if they knew? How do you react?



7. In the last verse, Jesus goes into the temple, looks around and leaves.

So: Was it getting too late? Was the timing just not right? Had he put all his energy into the donkey plan and still needed to work on a next big idea? Was he casing the joint?



8. The next day (only in Mark’s telling of the story), Jesus will come back and do what we normally call “cleansing the temple,” but could more clearly call disrupting the living daylights outta the whole operation and shutting down worship. The term used isn’t cleansing, but overturning, overthrowing, destroying.

So: In this very center of their culture and hierarchy and sense of worth, how would the elites

respond? How would the people feel about this desecration? What if your worship were dramatically interrupted? What was Jesus hoping to accomplish or trying to provoke by upsetting the people and the system?



9. The Palm Sunday parade can feel like a festival, a celebration. It might’ve been meant like some stylized victory march. But the feeling doesn’t last long.

So: As it goes on, would we think of Jesus as a winner or a loser? As overly humble, or too provocative? Should he have tried something else? What would it mean for this to have ended differently? For all of us who wanted to be saved, does Jesus fulfill or disappoint our hopes? Or both? Why would God want to be identified with this person, in this way?