

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11 Jesus' triumphal entry

Sermon, part 1

In his telling narrative, the author of the Gospel of Mark indicates that Jesus' triumphant entry is important. Why does Jesus, who has tried to keep his identity secret in public, choose to ride into Jerusalem in this carefully planned parody of a military procession?

Starting out at the Mount of Olives, using an unriden animal reserved for ceremonial and sacred use, and the cries of Hosanna and blessing - these are all echoes Old Testament expectations of the coming of the Messiah.

Such a symbolic entrance would surely seem treasonous to the empire. Yet, everything about the way Jesus' does this rejects their power and domination.

As the Gospel of Mark focuses on Jesus' identity and discipleship, we are also invited to watch the Passion story unfold through looking at humans and their choices as we ponder:

- What happened to Jesus' closest followers?
- How did evil lurk in the decisions made as they betray, abandon, and deny Jesus?
- How and why did this happen?
- How could so many groups, even his disciples, misunderstand who Jesus is?

Palm Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week and Jesus' journey to the cross. As we continue with this drama - what do you observe?

Scripture: Mark 14:1-25 Judas and betrayal

Scripture: Mark 14:26-50 All become deserters

Sermon part 2

How could the same people who shouted Hosanna turn to cries of crucify? Jesus' enemies, the Pharisees and the chief priests and elders stay in character - opposing him and his teaching and seeking to take his life.

Sandwiched between foretelling of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial, an anonymous woman comes to Jesus while he is visiting Simon in Bethany, and anoints his head with costly ointment.

Mark's gospel slows down giving us the narrative in slow motion....days and then by hours. We continue to see those who were called to leave everything, leave it all, including garments, behind! The disciples cannot even stay awake when Jesus prays at

Gethsemane... Three times he comes to them for support, only to find them sleeping - totally unaware that they don't recognize this moment of crisis in history and their part in it.

Scripture: Mark 14:53-72 Jesus before the Council

Scripture: Mark 15:1-19 Jesus with Pilate

Sermon part 3

Mark endeavors to show us Jesus' true identity as God incarnate, dwelling on earth among humans; through the repeated ridicule, derision, and sarcasm of everyone from the high priests to the Roman soldiers to Pilate and those viewing the cross.¹

Jesus suffering and death revealed the fragile connection to his friends and disciples who were not there for him in his hour of greatest need, the extreme cruelty of religious and governmental leaders, and the dangerous synergy of the combination of corrupt government power and mob justice. Even their legal system was manipulated.²

These destructive forces echo through history even to today. Ira Brent Driggers, in his commentary for workingpreacher, says "Mark simply wants us to see the human capacity both for coming to Jesus..... and for killing him."³

Jesus' suffering also revealed that he was, indeed, the Messiah - whose death offers a new covenant, in the mystery of God's larger story of love and hope for the world.

Mark's gospel repeatedly shows God's providence through echoes from the Psalms - in Jesus' silence before accusers, the division of his clothes, mockery by onlookers, and cry from the cross. Jesus himself repeatedly predicts his passion and resurrection, seeming to imply God's overarching faithfulness, acting through him on our behalf.⁴

The passion of Jesus Christ is a mystery.

But standing at a distance were other faithful followers, the two women from Galilee who had come to Jerusalem with Jesus. Unlike the disciples who failed, these "unlikely disciples" these women would stay with him now through death and burial, never abandoning him. And they would be the ones to bring the Risen Christ's message of joy and reconciliation to the disciples.

Scripture: Mark 15:20-39 Jesus' crucifixion and death

¹ Michael J. Chan, *Not Without God's Power*, Dear Working Preacher, March 21, 2021.

² Ibid.

³ Ira Brent Driggers, Commentary on Mark 15:1-30(40-47), workingpreacher.com, March 28, 2021.

⁴ Ira Brent Driggers, Commentary on Mark 15:1-30(40-47), workingpreacher.com, March 28, 2021.