

3.28.21 Palm Sunday What Will You Offer the Lord Mark 11:1-11

Today marks the beginning of what Christians call Holy Week. It begins with Palm Sunday when Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem with his disciples. Each of the four gospels presents Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with its own focus and its own details. Today we're getting Mark's account. If you read the story of Jesus in Mark's Gospel, you notice in the verses leading up to and including the events of Palm Sunday that people have very different responses to Jesus. That's something that hasn't changed. People like you and me still have very different responses to Jesus. You probably know people who respond to and think about Jesus differently than you do.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus and his disciples have been on their way to Jerusalem for a little while and shortly before they arrive, we hear this: **(Mark 10:32-34)** ***"They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."***

This is the third time Jesus has told the disciples the terrible fate that awaited him in Jerusalem so we can understand why those who followed Jesus were afraid. If you were on the road with someone and he told you for the third time, *"When we reach our destination, I'm going to be arrested beaten and killed,"* you'd be afraid too. What would you say? You might say, *"What are we doing? Let's not go there. Let's turn around."* But Jesus keeps going, and his followers, give them credit for their courage, go with him. That sets the stage for today's gospel, Mark 11:1-11,

"When 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. ³ If 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, 5 some of the bystanders said to them, *“What are you doing, untying the colt?”* 6 They told them what Jesus had said; **and they allowed them to take it.** 7 Then **they brought the colt to Jesus** and threw their cloaks on it; and **he sat on it.** 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 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!

10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

11 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.”

In the days leading up to Palm Sunday in Mark’s Gospel we hear the responses of several people who encounter Jesus one way, or another. One man had the opportunity to meet Jesus, face to face and have a personal conversation with him. Next are the disciples who knew Jesus better than anyone else. Then a blind man named Bartimaeus has a transforming experience with Jesus. We know the least about the final person. We don’t even know if he had the chance to meet Jesus and have a conversation with him or not. You may see yourself in one or more of their responses.

The first person we meet is a rich man in Mark 10:17-22. He ran up and knelt before Jesus, and asked him, *“**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**”* 18 Jesus said to him, *“**Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.**”* 19 *You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit a adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’ ”* 20 He said to him, *“Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.”* 21 **Jesus, looking at him, loved him** and said, *“You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then **come, follow me.**”* 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” His response to Jesus is, *“**I’m not willing to do what you’re asking me to do.**”* This rich man is a good guy. You’d love to have him as your next-door neighbor. He’s honest, faithful, trustworthy, committed to his family and successful. He recognizes Jesus as someone who is good and wise. In pursuing a good life, he is focused on what **he must do.** He reflects an approach that believes, *“If I’m good*

enough, if I follow all the commandments, and rules, then I'll inherit eternal life." While this is admirable because someone who is striving to be good and who follows the Ten Commandments is likely an admirable person, it ultimately isn't the path to eternal life. There's nothing we can do to deserve or earn eternal life. Jesus picks up on the man's use of the word "good" and realizes there is one thing that stands between this man and a life of total surrender to God.

Have you ever wished you could have met Jesus, face to face? Has that ever been a desire or dream of yours? Hearing his voice and seeing him in person? I think there are a lot of Christians who would say that would be the greatest thing ever. But what if it really happened? What if you got to see Jesus standing before you, looking like a middle eastern man of Jewish descent, and Jesus looked at you with love in his eyes and said, *"You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."* How would you feel at that moment? Maybe you'd say, or you'd like to think you'd say, *"I'd sell everything I have and give the money to the poor and hit the road with Jesus."* Then again, you might not. You might have some hesitation. You might wonder, *"How would I live? What would my family say? Do you know how long and how hard I've worked to accumulate all that I have? What's the retirement plan like? I didn't expect that to be what Jesus would say to me. I don't mind worshiping him or singing about him, but following him like this, I don't know."* We can sympathize with this good and rich man. This is a big ask. His response to Jesus is, ***"I'm not willing to do what you're asking me to do."***

The second response to Jesus leading up to Palm Sunday is in **Mark 10:28** where "Peter began to say to him, ***"Look, we have left everything and followed you."*** Peter is Jesus' right hand man, his #1 follower. Yet Peter's response illustrates a **"What's in it for me?"** approach to following Jesus. Peter, in a very human way you can appreciate, hears Jesus' conversation with the good rich man who Jesus loved immediately, sees that man walk away from Jesus shocked and grieving because he had many possessions (10:22), hears Jesus say how hard it will be for those of us with wealth to enter the kingdom of God (10:23), and you can hear the wheels turning in Peter's head, *"Gee, me and the other guys, we weren't like that rich man, we left our jobs and our families to follow Jesus all over the place. I wonder what we'll get!"* Peter is

thinking about **what's in it for me**. If you take an honest look in your heart and soul, you may find at least a bit of Peter's spirit dwelling there; perhaps at least the kernel of a belief, *"If I follow Jesus and try to live a good life and do what's right, then God will reward me and I'll be healthy, prosperous, and successful and nothing really bad will happen to me or my family because I try to do my best and follow Jesus."* We know this isn't true, but there may be a part of us that wishes it were so.

Jesus answers Peter's question (10:29-31) by telling him, *"Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30 **who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.** 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."*

Jesus is referring not only to what the disciples have done, but also to what he told the rich man who just left. The rich man had asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life, but he couldn't accept Jesus' answer. Now Jesus tells Peter, anyone who has left their home, family, or work for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the good news he's sharing will receive a reward greater than you can imagine...let me pause to say, can you see the look on Peter's face? I'm going to receive *"a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields,"* that's awesome! I'm so happy I chose to follow Jesus, look what's in it for me! While Peter is smiling and already daydreaming of all he's going to get, he gets yanked back into reality. What was that last word you said, Jesus? ***"with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life."*** I suspect Peter was taken aback when Jesus said in essence, *"You'll get a lot in this life, you're going to be part of the larger family God, you'll stay with many people in their homes, you will eat food you haven't planted or harvested, you will become a brother to more people than you can imagine. But there will also be persecution and pain on the way to eternal life."* Probably, not what Peter was expecting to hear.

The first response to Jesus is, I'm not willing to do what you're asking me to do." The second is, ***What's in it for me?*** The third response is seen in the two disciples who along with Peter make up Jesus' core inner circle. In **Mark 10:35-37 James and John**, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, ***"Teacher,***

we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” 36 And he said to them, *“What is it you want me to do for you?”* 37 And they said to him, *“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”*

While Peter asked *What’s in it for me?* **James and John represent a response to Jesus that moves from asking what reward we’ll get, to making demands on Jesus.** Their response to Jesus is **give me whatever I ask - even if what I want is inappropriate and selfish.** They want power and glory for themselves. Jesus basically says, you don’t know what you’re asking. Are you able to bear the suffering that I’m about to face? They say, “We’re able.” Then Jesus tells them, you will drink the cup and be baptized in the same way as me – with suffering, but I can’t grant your request to sit at my right or left in glory. Then Jesus must deal with the other disciples getting angry with James and John angling for and asking for power and glory to put themselves above the others.

Put yourself in Jesus’ sandals for a moment. Where are you going? To Jerusalem. What’s going to happen when you get there? I’m going to be betrayed, condemned mocked, spit on, flogged, and killed. And what are my three core leaders thinking about? **What’s in it for me? Give me whatever I ask.** We’re told Jesus loved the good, rich man, we know he loved the Peter, James, and John, but their responses from walking away from him to selfishness had to be incredibly hard for Jesus to take given what he was about to face.

The next person we meet in Mark’s Gospel who responds to Jesus is named **Bartimaeus**. Economically, he is the total opposite of the rich man, he is a beggar. Unlike the disciples who are healthy and strong young men, he is blind and sitting by the roadside. But Bartimaeus sees Jesus more clearly than they do. Bartimaeus’s response to Jesus is to shout out, ***“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*** Bartimaeus was publicly identifying Jesus as the King of the Jews, as the Messiah, a dangerous thing politically. Many ordered him sternly to be quiet because it makes many people uncomfortable when the poor or the sick are crying out for attention and help. Most people prefer that they’re quiet, unheard, and unseen, out of sight, out of mind, but Bartimaeus is shouting at the top of his lungs for mercy from Jesus. Jesus stopped walking, stood still, and said, *“Call him here.”* Throwing off his cloak,

Bartimaeus “**sprang up** and came to Jesus (10:50). All Bartimaeus wanted was to be able to see again and Jesus spoke the word and he immediately regained his sight, and he did what the rich man could not do – Bartimaeus *“followed him on the way.”*

Bartimaeus sees Jesus as the Messiah who can meet his need for mercy and healing.

So, we have a rich, good man, who would rather have his possessions than follow Jesus. We have disciples who are following Jesus, but are still thinking about themselves, what’s in it for them, what they will get, what honors, position, and glory they may receive, we have humble Bartimaeus, and then we have the final mystery person. In the Palm Sunday gospel, we hear about a colt that the Lord needs. The colt belongs to an unnamed person who is never identified. I’m often curious about people like this in the Bible.

Think about the story from the perspective of the owner of the colt. There seems to be a dynamic at work – **the Lord needs a colt and promises to send it back. Will you let it go so that what you have may be used to serve the Lord?** Or like the rich man, will you keep it to yourself and end up being sad, unable to let go of something that you think belongs to you?

The owner of the colt represents a response to Jesus of: **Will I offer what I have to Jesus? You have something Jesus needs, are you willing to give it to him, to trust it to him or not?** Imagine you own the colt, and your wife comes home and says, *“Honey, where’s the horse?”* *“Uh, some guy from out of town said he needed it?”* “Or imagine you’re a woman and your sister comes home and says, *“Hey, the colt we just got is gone!”* And you reply, *“Oh, don’t worry about it, I loaned it to a carpenter and a bunch of fishermen...they said they’d send it right back.”* *“Did you ask them what they needed it for?”* *“No, they said ‘the Lord needs it,’ so I figured why not?”*

Remember that in between the rich, good man, the disciples, and Bartimaeus and the owner of the colt is Jesus, who remains silent. **He doesn’t say a word in Mark 11 as he enters Jerusalem.** Did you notice that? His actions speak for themselves. Here he comes into the city, **willing to give up everything** for people like the good, rich man who walked away from him; for the “what’s in it for me disciples;” for blind beggars like Bartimaeus, and for the mystery owner of the colt.

As I look at these people around Jesus at the beginning of Holy Week it's a reminder, **you should expect that the faith that cost Jesus his life will cost you something.** At the end of **Mark 10:45**, before coming into Jerusalem, Jesus says, *"⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and **to give his life a ransom for many.**"* Jesus gave his life for you and me. You're invited to think about what you would give to him. **What does the Lord need that you're able to give? What will you offer the Lord?**

Mark, the first of the gospels to be written down, reveals the humblest, lowliest picture of Jesus on Palm Sunday. For Jesus, it is an entry into suffering and death. The silence of Jesus is striking. Perhaps his silence suggests, "I am the Messiah, and I will save; but not as you expect." Maybe part of his silence is wondering if his disciples will ever truly understand who he is and what following him truly means. Jesus is making the most generous offer possible; he is offering his life to show God's love for the world.

Think about how we can turn around some of the responses we've heard today. Instead of saying like the rich man: *I'm not willing to do what you're asking me to do.*

Say – **Not my will, God, but yours be done in and through me.**

Instead of saying: *What's in it for me?* Say: **What can I do for you?**

Instead of saying: *Give me whatever I ask.* Say: **Ask whatever you need of me.**

Shout with Bartimaeus: **Jesus, have mercy on me! And help me to follow you.**

With the Owner of the Colt, say: **Jesus, I offer you all I have for your use.**

I don't know what the Lord is asking of you today, and I don't know how you'll respond to Jesus, but I know that if you ask for mercy, if you'll have the courage to follow, and if you offer your whole self and everything you have to the Lord, it will change your life for eternity. Think what Peter, James, John, and Bartimaeus gained by sticking with Jesus. Think what the rich man missed out on. Who would you rather be?

Blessing: May the God of peace and love enable us to be obedient to his will in every way we can as we remember all Jesus gave for us. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. How would you describe your response to Jesus? Who is Jesus to you? If you have a family member or close friend who feels differently than you do, what do you think they would say?
2. In the encounter between the rich man and Jesus in Mark 10:17-22, which of the Ten Commandments does Jesus mention? Why do you think he only mentioned those? Does he do them in order (see Exodus 20:1-17)? Notice the use of the word “good” in their conversation. What do you think is going on with that?
3. Peter is thinking about what’s in it for me (Mark 10:28). If you take an honest look in your heart and soul, do you have any of Peter’s spirit; have you even unconsciously thought, *“If I follow Jesus and try to live a good life and do what’s right, then God will reward me, and I’ll be healthy, prosperous, and successful and nothing really bad will happen to me or my family because I try to do my best and follow Jesus.”* Why do you think we can fall into this type of belief?
4. The response of James and John to Jesus is give me whatever I ask - even if what I want is inappropriate and selfish. Any parent knows not to say, “Yes” to children asking (Mark 10:35), “We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” What does this request say about James and John, as well as about us?
5. What do you find encouraging or hopeful about Bartimaeus interaction with and response to Jesus?
6. What do you think of the response of the owner of the colt to offer willingly and without hesitation what the Lord needed?
7. What do you take away from all these different responses to Jesus, days before his death? If the story of your response to Jesus was told, what would you want that story to be?