

Setting the Stage

Mark 11:1-11

God motivates me to teach. That's why I often include a text copy of my sermon. It's for further study and reflection. The text is more complete than I can cover in the time of a sermon. I add supporting scripture references. The most authoritative way to know God is through His word, the Bible.

Before we move into the final events leading to the cross, let's pause and think a little further about the section we just finished: what it takes to be a follower of Jesus.

It begins after Jesus feeds the 4000 and he warns them about the unbelief spread by the Pharisees and Herod. We hear Jesus say, "Do you still not understand?" (8:21). Finally, Peter is given divine knowledge and declares Jesus is the Christ (8:29) but they can't accept the kind of saving Jesus has come to do (8:32-33). They want the other Messiah...who kicks out the Romans and sets up His kingdom on earth forever. That's when Jesus makes His famous declaration of discipleship. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me...whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it (8:34-35). Mark's gospel shows us that Jesus is God's Son, sent to save us. We find

that no one can be saved except by God's grace. Those who are counting on this world's riches and power will not be saved because Jesus is not their Savior (10:21-28). Among Jesus' followers, the way to be great in God's eyes, is to be a servant (10:42-44). The family Jesus is building is concerned to help preserve one another's faith and be a peace with one another (9:50). That takes the kind of love only God can give.

Church, Jesus started a community. We can see how that community begins to go global in Acts. When He sends the Holy Spirit to help people find Christ – the way the truth and the life. Today, believers are still indwelt by God's Spirit - helping one another deepen faith and love. Our loyalty to God and care for one another compels us to be unCanadian at times times. We have to go beyond polite and surface. We are to notice when a brother or sister is wavering in the faith or walking down a road with pitfalls. People still make their own choices and will stand alone before Jesus as judge. But we help each other lay down what is standing in the way of making Jesus our Lord. And gently pointing it out. Help them with it when appropriate. We also need to notice when God is using someone in

a wonderful way. It helps us understand the way God has gifted us...how we fit into the body of Christ (Rom 12:3ff).

Bartimaeus the blind beggar had his cloak as security: a buffer from people on the road, a place to catch coins, something to lay on and something to keep warm with. He gave that up. If we want to be the community Christ is building, we need to toss our cloaks aside, too. The buffer we use to avoid telling any other believers how we're doing spiritually. When a person has been deeply hurt from opening up, it understandable to be careful who you would confess sin or struggles to. Beware it does not become an excuse to take back control from God. God uses the church to grow us too.

Sadly, we could be loving someone with a buffer around their spiritual condition...and never find out till it's too late, they never received the good news fully...like the seed that falls on the path, the rocky soil or the heart full of weeds.

Are we responsible for those souls? God is not limited to us. But consider God's word through James: *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will*

save that person from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Jesus is the Savior and we can't be the Holy Spirit. But we are God's vessels. We can make room in our lives to care beyond the surface...even if it's unCanadian. In God's family, when one is hurting we all hurt some. When one is honored, we all rejoice (1 Cor 12:12-26).

After the service, I'm going to try something different for a while...to make room for people who need to respond following the service. Instead of heading to the back to see you out, I'll be staying at the front for those God is convicting or seeking clarification, or just need someone to pray with.

Pray

If we knew the Queen was passing through Lillooet...how do you think people would prepare?

Where do you think she would stop to look? City hall memorial

It would be quite a scene, wouldn't it? People trying to impress her. Our 100 year old lady shows up...

When the Queen visits Ottawa, where does she stop? Parliament Hill (2010 Canada Day)

Some people don't go for big scenes, others like to plan and attend them. There's an old saying that's been refined by William Shakespeare: "All

the world's a stage. And the men and women merely players."

God has a flair for the dramatic. As this story unfolds, I hope it will cause us to consider that we have an important part to play in God's story of rescue and redemption.

Mark could have included the other Jericho story about Zacchaeus. Or other journeys back and forth through the region. He could have written about Jesus recently raising Lazarus from the dead...that all Judea was buzzing with the news. No wonder there were crowds this early for Passover around Bethany.

But Mark doesn't even mention the Passover yet. His concern is to show Jesus' determination to meet the ransom price for humanity...at the hands of his religious enemies and the Romans in Jerusalem. Mark's clue that Jesus will be received like a king before His death is from the shouts of Bartimaeus the blind beggar. "Jesus, Son of David. Have mercy on me!" He openly declares Jesus is more than a prophet. He is in the line of king David, the saving one. And Jesus does nothing to silence the notion.

Meanwhile, the disciples plod along still quite confused about Jesus' mission. As ordinary men, they fail to understand Jesus has come to serve as

the final priest and sacrifice for all humanity.

Bartimaeus the blind beggar in the desert dust of Jericho (850 ft below sea level) is given sight and salvation by king Jesus: the merciful.

Why? Because of his faith. Faith is most precious to God...for it opens our heart to receive His grace...that it may be poured out around us.

Proving...God is good. (all the time).

Bartimaeus the believer joins in behind the disciples as they ascend for 18 miles (3500 ft) to the Mount of Olives. From dessert to vegetation and fig orchards at the top. And a panoramic view of the valley of Jehoshaphat (where God shall judge) in front of Jerusalem. What a sight that would be for someone with newly recovered sight.

V1-3 The Lord's Mysterious Order

Is this a Jedi trick? How did Jesus know about this donkey colt (Matt 21:2). Mark leaves it a mystery...they just have to trust Jesus on this. Why is there so much detail included with borrowing a young donkey? Is it for shopping in Jerusalem? Seriously, did you know what it was for the very first time you heard it? We didn't live in those times and we're not Jews. Way back, it was a tradition that an animal never ridden before was reserved for the king. You'll see how the disciples figure this out right away. They were staying in

Bethany (Jn 12:1) so it's likely Jesus was directing them to Bethphage. They are to say the one who needs it is 'the Lord'. It's like saying the king needs it. But this king is the kind that gives it back.

Now let's say I'm the Canadian secretary to the Queen and I told a couple of you to prepare for the Queen's visit by going up to the hop farm. And there you will find a Hyundai Pony on the side of the road with the keys in the ignition. And if anyone says, What are you doing? Say, the Queen is using it today, we'll bring it back right after." I don't know how far you'd get...in our day. But if they let you borrow it, you can bet they're coming to the parade to brag about their car being used by the Queen. Could you imagine the owner of that donkey? He probably got more mileage out of that story than if he'd owned a chariot with Arabian Stallions.

I've had to borrow rides many times. It brings people together in amazing ways. I want to affirm the generosity we have in this family of believers. But what really counts is that God notices...even a cup of water given in Jesus name is seen and rewarded by Him (Mk 9:41) unless we're doing it for our own glory (Matt 6:1).

V4-6 Retrieving the Stage Prop

Everything goes just as Jesus instructed. I titled this sermon, 'setting the stage'. Because with one carefully planned donkey, and the silent acceptance of the shouts during the parade, Jesus sets up the conditions for a showdown at the end of the week. One God has been planning for a long time...with a surprise surrender. Jesus will join the many other lambs for sacrifice this Passover. But His service as a ransom for people's sin is once and for all who believe.

V7 The Scene begins

Right on cue without being told, the disciples prepare the mighty steed and Jesus sits on it...probably doesn't even need to hop to get on. Consider both the Majesty and the Meekness of Christ. This is the Lion of Judah of Revelation (5:5-6), who appears to John as a Lamb in the middle of a great throne. In Jesus, we find the one who commands the storm to be quiet, feeds 1000s out of a few fish and loaves, binds Satan to free people from demons...Yet, delights to hold and bless infants and stop for a blind beggar. Jesus does not come on a mighty war horse to terrify and crush His enemies (not this time). His 'military escort' is some fishermen, laborers, tax collectors and woman. His bounty is a man with new eyes who believes. What kind of a Messiah

is He? Why do the religious and political leaders feel threatened? Is He not Jesus, the merciful and just?

V8-10 The Crowd Joins In

When the evil Jehoram became king of Israel (850BC), the Lord decided he must be destroyed. Elisha, the prophet got a secret message through to Jehu, the commander of the royal army. And Jehu was anointed as God's chosen king instead. When Jehu's officers found out, they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps, blew the trumpet and proclaimed Jehu as king (2 Kgs 9). The spreading of cloaks and soft branches in our present scene demonstrates honor due to a king. But there's also a subtle reminder that God is the one that changes who's in power.

It's just like the prophet predicted.

Read Zech 9:9-10

The hope for Jerusalem is that a king of righteousness, salvation and peace for all nations will come humbly mounted on a donkey colt.

The ones following and the ones ahead of Jesus fit into the scene too...shouting out their hopes and praises to God. The street choir chants one of the Hallel (thanksgiving) Psalms used when approaching the temple (Ps 118:25-27). There are Messianic overtones but not so obvious that the Romans are alerted. Hosanna is a standard praise word but it also

means "Save us, now. Save, I pray. The shouts about David's kingdom are unusual. When combined with the cry of Bartimaeus, there's a Messianic tone. The final shout acknowledges God is Savior.

The stage is being set. We know from Luke's account (19:39) that some Pharisees were alarmed. God intends for the religious leaders to understand this message. And their growing fear of losing power will drive them to take a big chance with the crowd's loyalties to have Jesus killed. Just as the humble beast carries the king, so the king will humbly bear the wrath of God for humanity's sin.

As the procession moves through the valley of kings, they pass several important tombs and burial complexes. It all adds to the irony of the scene before us.

No parade of man is worthy of this king. His true inauguration begins when He ascends to heaven to be honored by the Father and rule in heaven. The next time He returns, it will be with a mighty war horse to set up a kingdom for a thousand years. There will be one more huge rebellion squashed, final judgement where all evil will be destroyed once and for all...and finally heaven will come down to a recreated earth (Rev 19-22). God with His people forever in peace.

It seems everyone has found their place in the scene Jesus has set up. It's all part of God's plan to send a message.

Are we finding our place in God's plan? What message does He desire to send through us? (ie. 1 Pet 2:9-12)

Do we just blend in?

Do we try to stick out "look at me!"

Or something different?

Most of us need to stop being so entertained by the dramas this world creates and enter God's story. It never wastes time because it counts forever.

God is asking us to serve His people and bring God glory through the humble grace He gives us to love the people we meet each day.

V11 First Order of Business

They must have known Jesus would end up at the temple. He never misses a Passover. It's like we know the Queen would stop at Parliament Hill. The temple is where honored guests and kings go. It's the number one attraction. It's why Alexander the

great came to Jerusalem...to make a sacrifice at the Temple. But the crowd just kind of fizzles out. There's no grand welcome for a Messiah King. What a letdown.

Josephus, the Jewish historian at that time says that up to 255,000 lambs were bought and sacrificed and eaten at Passover. That's a lot of business and there's more than just lambs being sold. They say the population in and around Jerusalem could rise from around 50,000 to 2 million.

Jesus is taking it all in, firsthand.

Is there a place to worship?

Peace to pray?

This used to be the place where God's special presence dwelt. This is where God sent Gabriel to tell old Zacharias that he was going to have a baby boy named John...to prepare the people for Jesus. What is Jesus seeing now. I think it was a very quiet walk back up to Bethany. We will see what's stirring in Jesus next week.