

Scripture:

Psalm 118:1-2 & 19-29

Mark 11:1-11

“Things are not as they seem.”

There is a certain tension --- and uneasiness --- to Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem just before His crucifixion --- on Palm Sunday today.

And the tension and uneasiness ----- isn’t all that obvious if we only look at the account we have in Mark’s gospel today.

Of course in retrospect ---- looking back with the benefit of the knowledge of what takes place at the very end of the week ----- betrayal ---- beating and crucifixion ----- the tension ----- uncertainty --- and mixed emotions --- become far more obvious.

But simply reading Mark’s account as it stands without also the foreknowledge of what happens beyond this day ---- there isn’t any great sense of tension or strain.

That those who today shout ---- “Hosanna” --- and ---- “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ---- Hosanna in the highest heaven!” ----- will also shout 5 days later --- “Crucify Him ----- Crucify Him” ----- certainly creates a certain tension.

But to get a better sense of this tension we have to look beyond just Mark’s gospel.

In John’s --- chapter 11 ---- verse 55-57 ---- we find these words.

“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?” But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.”

“They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?” But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.”

Tension ----- anticipation.

They were looking for Jesus --- and wondering if He was going to show up - --- or if He would simply stay away.

Uneasiness.

What might happen if He does show up ---- after all the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that anyone who sees Him should report it --- so that they might arrest Him before He has the chance to say or do anything.

Mixed emotions.

Will Jesus come and finally free us from Roman occupation ----- will He come riding in majesty and power an awe --- waving a mighty arm and holding a powerful sword ----- finally freeing Israel from foreign occupation ---- or will He come meekly and simply be arrested?

There are a lot of emotions and tension and strain --- and anticipation ---- with Jesus’ ----- Passover ---- Palm Sunday arrival in Jerusalem.

In their book ---- “The Last Week” --- theologians Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan --- like John’s gospel ----- paint a tension filled image.

They paint the image of Jerusalem here in the middle ---- with two diametrically opposed processions headed for her --- both happening at exactly the same time.

On the one hand they paint the image of the Roman army ---- the current ruling order --- all decked out with armour and horses and chariots and swords and spears --- battle gear ----- marching into Jerusalem ----- ready to fight and kill --- and defend and exercise worldly power and might ---- to anyone who might cause an uproar or even a stir in Jerusalem.

And on the other hand they paint the image of Jesus ---- meek --- humble ---- and lowly ----- the future “ruling order” ----- no sword --- or spear --- no armour or chariot ----- just a colt ----- some Palm branches and coats ---- a parade of people shouting ----- and rejoicing the arrival of a new King.

2 diametrically opposed processions ----- set on a collision course ----- about to come to a head in Jerusalem.

And in a way that’s exactly what happens --- 2 processions --- that of the world --- and that of God ----- crashing together ----- and --- as we soon see ----- something --- beautiful --- and awe inspiring --- powerful and saving ----- emerges from this great collision.

The beginning of Holy Week ---- Palm Sunday ---- is the beginning of a collision course.

The ways of the world -- power --- might ---- force --- earthly understanding of kingship ----- on the one hand ----- and then on the other ----- humility ---love ---- compassion ---- servanthood ---- salvation ----- divine kingship --- fulfillment --- providence.

Tension --- uneasiness --- anticipation ----- mixed emotions.

Things are not as simple as they seem.

And of course Jesus knows this and has a keen sense of the tension.

Listen to the way He instructs His disciples to get the colt --- verses 2 and 3 from Mark’s gospel reading today:

“Go the village ahead of you.

And just as you enter it --- you will find a colt tied there which no one has ever ridden.

Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you, “Why are you doing this?” say, “the Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.”

This sounds --- very slow --- detailed and deliberate to me.

He doesn't just say --- go ahead to the next village and get me a colt --- it will be right there when you enter ---- go get it and bring it to me.

Instead it's ----- "Go the village ahead of you.

And just as you enter it --- you will find a colt tied there which no one has ever ridden.

Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "the Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly."

Calm --- slow and deliberate.

If anyone has ever taken any CPR or first aid training one of the first things they teach you is that you have to be calm ---- slow ----- direct and deliberate when giving orders in a crisis situation.

If you need someone to call 911 --- you don't say ---- "Someone call 911" -- -- instead you have to stop take in a specific person and direct them saying something like ----- "You with the yellow coat go and call 911."

Jesus knows there's some tension ----- anxiety ----- and uneasiness in Jerusalem as He prepares to enter ----- so He is slow and direct and deliberate with His disciples.

"Go the village ahead of you.

And just as you enter it --- you will find a colt tied there which no one has ever ridden.

Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "the Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly."

Things are not as they seem.

This isn't just the triumphant entry of a new king --- of **THE** King even ----- this is also a death march for this King.

On the one hand Jesus enters Jerusalem as a pilgrim ---- a teacher --- of special standing --- one many see as a messenger of God.

Many see His arrival as the ushering in of a new time for Jerusalem.

A time of blessing both for the city and for Jesus as He is finally received and treated like the King He truly is --- a time when He will finally be given the respect he deserves.

But of course nothing could be further from the truth.

If we read on past our passage from Mark's gospel reading today we see that the very next day ---- Jesus is overturning tables in the Temple courts and driving out money changers and animals with a whip of cords.

He's there to disrupt temple practices and turn things around ---- and on a much larger scale than just cultural practices like money changers and sacrificial offerings.

Things are not as they seem ----- as the next week ---- as Holy Week bears out.

And the theme of --- things are not as they seem --- isn't just about Palm Sunday ----- "things are not as they seem" ----- runs through Mark's gospel in a number of different ways.

First of all Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah --- but his understanding of this title conflicts with the Messiah who stands before him.

And then there are the disciples ---- who also engage in a similar kind of misunderstanding ----- wanting Jesus to grant them seats adjacent to His own in the kingdom ----- thinking there is some kind of prestige and honour to be granted by Him.

And then today in our passage the misunderstanding extends to those in Jerusalem who throw down their coats --- shout praises ----- and wave palm branches --- welcoming the kingdom of David --- but really have no idea what this kingdom truly means.

And as we will see as we journey through Holy Week ----- this gross misunderstanding very quickly turns into rejection ----- betrayal ---- arrest -- ----- and finally crucifixion.

Things definitely aren't as they seem.

This festive ---- Palm waving --- Hosanna shouting procession ----- isn't all that simple --- neat and tidy --- or straightforward as it seems.

Too many of the people as they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with shouts of -----

"Hosanna" --- and ---- "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! --- ---- Hosanna in the highest heaven!"----- only ever opened their coats and placed branches before Him ----- and not also their hearts.

The very same way that people opened up their coats and placed Palm branches before Him ----- so too does He want us to open up our hearts and place them before Him too.

Yes it's helpful to take off whatever it is we clothe ourselves with ----- whatever it is we try to cover ourselves up with ----- and lay it at the feet of Christ --- but Jesus wants more than just this.

In addition to coats and branches ---- things we may hide behind --- or cover ourselves up with ----- He also wants us to lay open and spread our very hearts before Him.

This festive parade --- triumphant entry into Jerusalem ---- this Palm Sunday procession.

Was about far more than just laying things down.

Things like ---- coats and palm branches.

Things like ---- old ways of being --- and understanding.

Things like ----- preconceived notions of power and authority ----- and kingship and Lordship.

This procession of Christ was also about far more as well.

It was about God opening Himself up to the human condition on a profound and get your hands dirty level.

It was about God entering the human condition on such a profound level so that He could transform the human condition forever ---- bringing salvation - ---- atonement --- reconciliation ---- redemption and love ---- like never before.

What starts out with shouts of acclamation --- a festive procession with shouts of ----- “Hosanna” --- and ---- “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Very quickly turns into betrayal ----- mocking ---- beating ---- and death --- with shouts of ---- “Crucify Him!” ---- “Crucify Him!”

Today we have ----- “Hosanna” --- and ---- “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ----- Hosanna in the highest heaven!” ----- but this very week ends with something completely different --- betrayal ----- mocking ---- beating --- with the very same people who shouted “Hosanna” - -- and ---- “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ----- shouting - ----- “Crucify Him!” ---- “Crucify Him!” --- and finally death ----- crucifixion.

It's not until next week ----- Easter Sunday ---- that all of this is changed ---- and things become clear what this very difficult tension filled week was truly all about.

This complex week that begins on this tension filled day is full of every human emotion imaginable as Jesus enters into Jerusalem for the very last time.

God came into Jerusalem in Jesus Christ in 31 AD ---- changing things forever.

Changing life -----

Changing death ---

Changing love ---

Changing compassion ---

Changing forgiveness ---

Changing salvation ----

Changing the whole kit and caboodle ----- permanently --- forever.

And so it is that God comes into our hearts.

Each and every one of our hearts --- one by one by one ----- humbly --- calmly --- directly ----- decisively ----- in the person of Jesus Christ changing us permanently and forever.

And if for some reason you don't feel like you've experienced this just yet -- - don't worry ---- orient your heart to Him --- and He will look after the rest.

Things are most certainly not as they seem in Mark's gospel reading today as Jesus enters into Jerusalem.

And things aren't always as they seem in the world today either.

It can be a huge challenge to live by faith.

In the face of things like --- violence --- hatred --- failing health challenges -- --- relationship challenges --- parenting issues --- family struggles --- grief -- ----- loss ----- and so on --- it can be difficult to live by faith.

But things are not always as they seem ----- Jesus Christ is still entering into our broken world daily.

Many in Jerusalem laid open their garments and placed down Palm branches but failed to open up the hearts and place them at Christ's feet.

God wants us to open our hearts up to Him.

God wants us to place our hearts --- our lives at His feet.

Giving ourselves over to Him --- just as Jesus did ---- coming into Jerusalem to give Himself away in God's love.

Something happened that day long ago as Jesus entered into Jerusalem headed for sure and certain death.

Something happens inside each and every one of us every time we let Jesus come into our lives and take over.

This is an amazing week --- we enter into today.

The descent to greatness --- and so much more that is Holy week ---- begins today as Jesus walks into Jerusalem about to rock the world into a whole new reality.

Before Jesus can walk out of the grave He first needs to walk into it ---- and that journey begins today in a heightened and special way.

The week that begins today may end in profound sadness ---- suffering ---- and death ---- Good Friday ---- and dark ---- Holy Saturday.

But by next week there will be a whole new reality ---- new life ---- Easter life.

The procession that begins today ends quite differently than ever imagined.

Things are not always as they seem.

Amen.