

April 5, 2009

Scripture: Mark 11: 1-11

Sermon: "Why Are You Doing This?"

We have come to the gates of Jerusalem. We started this journey a little under forty days ago. We started this journey with trepidation. We started this journey with fear, not knowing what we would discover about ourselves or about our relationship with God. We started this journey with hope because we know the end of the story. We started this journey to Jerusalem, knowing what would face us once we got here. We started this journey a little under forty days ago.

And now we are here! We are standing outside the gates of Jerusalem and we are celebrating. We are celebrating the King of Kings. We are celebrating the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We are celebrating. We are waving palms. We are spreading our cloaks down on the ground in front of Jesus. We are celebrating!

It's Palm Sunday! The day Jesus rides into town with his followers shouting before him, "Hosanna." The day Jesus rides into town with his disciples bringing up the rear of the parade, thinking, "Now is the time!" The day that Jesus' disciples who have been with him from the very beginning knew would come. They are shouting, "Hosanna!" They are waving palms. They are throwing their cloaks down on the ground in front of Jesus. They know that the Messiah has come. And they are celebrating.

And today we join in their celebration. We join in as they cry Hosanna. We join in as they shout, "Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord." We join in as they proclaim Jesus, King of Kings.

It's Palm Sunday and we are celebrating!

And amid our joyous and boisterous celebration, author of Mark interrupts our parade and ask us, "Why are you doing this?" Why are you waving palms? Why are you shouting Hosanna? Why are you saying Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord? Why are you doing this?

We are so horrified by his question that we drop our palms. Our mouths drop open in shocked amazement and the choruses of Hosannas fall quiet. We are literally stopped in our tracks by the audacity of Mark's question: "Why are we doing this?" What kind of question is that? we give Mark a look and wonder if he has been living under a rock for the last 40 days. "Uh, we are doing this because it's Jesus. You know, Jesus. Healer, Preacher, Teacher. Jesus. Miracle Worker. God's Only Son. Messiah. Jesus who is here to save God's people. You know, Jesus. Why wouldn't we celebrate? Jesus is here. Jesus is going to take care of everything. Jesus is going to march right up to the Temple and set things straight. Jesus is going to tell the powers that be to get out of town and God's people will be free!

Mark, don't you understand? This is Jesus' high noon moment: He is going to stride into the city, with a confident swagger, with a gleam in his eye that let's everyone know he means business, and save God's people!

And Mark replies: You think this is Jesus' high noon moment. You think this is the moment when Jesus is going to use to save God's people. You think this is the moment when Jesus will restore the people of God. You think this is the moment when Jesus will bring about the Kingdom of God.

Then you don't know the rest of the story. Then you don't know why Jesus came for us. Then you don't really understand why you proclaim him King of Kings, why you wave your palms or lay your cloaks down on the road before him.

You think this is Jesus' high noon moment. Just wait. Just wait.

And after this peculiar conversation with Mark, we try to go back to our celebration, still looking at him as if he is crazy or just missing a few marbles. We try to put this peculiar conversation behind us. We try to ignore Mark's response. We try to dismiss Mark's command for us to just wait. What does he know? Why do we have to wait? The moment is here. The moment is now. Jesus is coming in like a King.

And so we try to get back in the festive mood, but Mark's question bothers us: "Why are you doing this?" we pick up our palms to begin waving them again, but we notice that Jesus stops just short of the entrance of the city, hops off the donkey, and walks in, like a regular guy. "Why is he doing that?"

we try to get the crowd to once again pick up the chant of Hosanna, but the crowd is quiet as we notice that Jesus walks up the Temple, takes a look around, and then leaves the city once more with his disciples.

"Why is he doing that?"

Jesus stops the parade, walks into the city, takes a look around, and then leaves.

And now we are the ones asking: "why are you doing this? Jesus, This is your moment. This is your high noon moment. Jesus, Walk confidently up to the Romans and tell them to get out of Dodge. Jesus, take control and save God's people. Jesus, be the King that we know you are and restore the people of God once more. Jesus, where are you going? Jesus, get back here. Jesus, don't leave. This is your moment. This is your high noon moment. Jesus, come back and save God's people!"

Why is he doing that? Why did Jesus leave? Why didn't Jesus be the Messiah that we all know he is? Why is he doing this?"

And all we can think about as we stand there with broken palms and dirty cloaks is: What a let down! Jesus didn't do anything. Jesus didn't take control. Jesus didn't show those Romans whose who. Jesus just took a look around the Temple and left. What a let down. What kind of Messiah does that? What kind of King does reclaim his kingdom? What kind of Messiah is Jesus anyway?

And it is that moment that we remember Mark's question. "Why are you doing these things? Why are you waving your palm branches? Why are you throwing your cloaks down in front of Jesus? Why are you doing these things?"

And we admit that we still don't understand. We still don't understand Jesus' true nature as Messiah. We still don't understand why we proclaim him King of Kings.

We find ourselves standing in confusion with the disciples as Jesus surveys the Temple, wondering who is this man? We find ourselves standing, bewildered as Jesus quietly exits the city. We find ourselves, puzzled, wondering who this man, this Jesus really is?

And the only answer that we can find is that he is not the type of king that we expected. The only clarity that we can find is that he is not the Messiah that we expected. The only solution that we know is that Jesus is not what we expected and that this moment, this moment of triumphal entry is not Jesus' high noon moment.

And we wonder what is that moment, what is that moment when God's people will be saved, what is that moment when God's people will be restored, what is that moment when all of God's people will be made whole once more.

And we wonder and we know that all we can do now is wait. Just wait.

And live out the rest of the week to come. We must go to the upper room with Jesus and his disciples, and share in one last meal. We must go to the Garden and hear the anguish in Jesus' voice as he asks God to let this cup pass from him. We must feel the pain and hurt as Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. We must feel the sense of abandonment as Peter denies Jesus three times.

We must feel the grief, the despair, the suffering as Jesus is nailed to the cross.

And as we live out the rest of the week, when it all becomes too much, when we can stand it no more, we will once again find ourselves asking: "Jesus, why are you doing this?"

And it is only then will we understand why we proclaim Jesus King of Kings. And it is only then will we understand why we wave our palm branches. And it is only then will we understand why Jesus came to us and for us.

May we have the courage and strength to wait and see what this week will bring. Amen.

Rev. Heather McColl
Midway Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)