

# The Triumphal Entry

*Mark 11: 1-11*

**11** When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’ ” <sup>4</sup> They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup> some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” <sup>6</sup> They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup> Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

<sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>1</sup>

Have you noticed how quickly things can change? One day you are on track to go to a place and do an activity, but you or someone make a decision or does an action and all that changes. A college student is studying to become a teacher, but a selection to be in an exclusive group and a chance conversation with a colleague changes her direction and she discovers she can get a master’s degree and become a counselor if she applies to and is accepted for a scholarship into a special program sponsored by the United States Department of Education. A young woman dreams of marrying her college sweetheart but meets someone else because her roommate set her up with a blind date without her knowledge...and her life goes in a different direction. A middle-aged woman has a

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). (Mk 11:1–11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

conversation with a woman who went to seminary in her 60s, and then gets an invitation to a seminary open house and God calls her into the ministry in a way she never imagined. The older we get, the less surprised we are because experience teaches us that God has a plan for our lives that are very different from what we anticipated...our best advice is just hold on for the ride!

In Jesus' case, there were no surprises, but for his disciples and for the world, things in his life changed the world! In our scripture, the disciples had been following Jesus for over three years; they had witnessed his signs and wonders. Most recently they had seen him raise his friend after four days in the tomb. They were aware their religious leaders were determined to arrest Jesus and they had collectively decided to return to Jerusalem with him, come what may.

Jesus was honored on Sunday with the parade of a king, comes into Jerusalem with the countless pilgrims to celebrate Passover, the celebration of deliverance from Egyptian slavery. Our scripture is a dramatic but, in some ways, puzzling event in the story of Jesus' movement toward his destiny. Why does Jesus decide to ride into Jerusalem in a way that invites acclaim? Why at this point in his ministry does he make an almost triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the stronghold of his enemies? By this time, Jesus has no real doubt that he will meet a violent death. Is this entry into Jerusalem a challenge to his opponents? Part of a journey marked by deeper and deeper letting go of all things except the will of God? A sign of things to come, no matter what will happen to him in Jerusalem?

No matter our age, we know that when he enters Jerusalem this time it will be the last time; this is the road to his death. On three previous occasions in this Gospel Jesus has tried to tell his disciples that his destiny is to suffer grievously—to be rejected, delivered into the hands of his enemies, condemned to death, and

yet to rise again (8:31–32, 9:30–32, 10:32–34). But they have not had ears to hear—not about Jesus’ destiny and not about their own.

Up until now Jesus has cautioned the disciples and others not to say anything publicly about the great works he has done in their presence. Insofar as anyone did understand who he was, they have been warned to say nothing of what they know or have seen. But now, in this week before Passover, Jesus decides to enter Jerusalem with full publicity—to receive the acclaim of the crowds and to appear before the world as if he is fulfilling one of the messianic prophecies. We know, however, that Jesus is not the sort of messiah that the crowds either expect or want.

Within a week, acclaim will turn into humiliation and mockery. Palm Sunday leads to Good Friday. The honored Jesus will become the humiliated Jesus. Mark says it this way:

<sup>22</sup> Then they brought Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). <sup>23</sup> And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

<sup>25</sup> It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” <sup>27</sup> And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>29</sup> Those who passed by derided<sup>[c]</sup> him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save yourself, and come down from the cross!” <sup>31</sup> In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. <sup>32</sup> Let the Messiah,<sup>[d]</sup> the King of Israel, come

down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

<sup>33</sup> When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land<sup>Ⓜ</sup> until three in the afternoon. <sup>34</sup> At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>Ⓜ</sup> <sup>35</sup> When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." <sup>36</sup> And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." <sup>37</sup> Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

Do we have here, held together in the tale of these two days, a revelation of dignity so sure that it finally overwhelms whatever would contradict it? Is it possible that in the center of apparent foolishness we shall behold glory, and out of what seems to be a final death there will emerge the ultimate power of life?

Frank Sinatra sang:

That's life  
That's what all the people say  
You're riding high in April  
Shot down in May  
But I know I'm gonna change that tune  
When I'm back on top, back on top in June

Jesus' actions were not like ours or Frank Sinatra's. He came that we might have life and it more abundantly!

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest, J. D. (2008). In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B* (Vol. 2, pp. 152–157). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.