

From Hosanna to the Cross  
Palm/Passion Sunday April 5, 2009  
[Mark 11:1-11](#), [Mark 14:1-10](#)

Our scripture readings for today depict two very different scenes. In the first, Jesus prepares to make a triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. You can probably picture the scene. Jesus tells his disciples to bring a colt for him to ride into town. He doesn't ask for the finest camel (or in modern terms a vintage Corvette); just a practical, unadorned colt. Crowds flocked to wherever Jesus went, and this was no exception. They could probably see him coming down the road and raised the local alarm. Everyone came out to worship Jesus in the streets, throwing their cloaks on the ground and spreading palm branches as a sign of respect and honor. This is not a quiet, reserved scene. People were shouting, 'Hosanna', 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' Chances are there are

those whom Jesus had healed among the crowd. I am sure the disciples were in their full glory – finally Jesus was being recognized by the crowd and they were his faithful followers. Surely the crowd noticed the disciples as well.

Yet in the midst of triumph, a storm was brewing beneath the surface. The chief priests and scribes were looking for some excuse to arrest Jesus. They wanted him eliminated. Why? Why would they mistrust someone who had repeatedly healed and provided for those less fortunate among them? Jesus had fed the multitudes, calmed stormy seas, healed those who were sick and therefore ostracized from society, even raising some from the dead. Are these not the acts of the Messiah?

The scribes and chief priests perhaps had a very different idea of their Messiah. Perhaps they envisioned the Messiah who would enter Jerusalem in the full splendor, glory, and majesty

that would depict the son of God. Perhaps, as leaders responsible for the holiness of society, they would be recognized as the most holy ones and therefore would be given status in the court of the Messiah. Clearly status was important to the chief priests and scribes who went to great lengths to make sure others noticed their importance. But Jesus didn't fit any of their expectations and had repeatedly criticized them as hypocrites. It was a group of poor fishermen that accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders had had enough. They wanted Jesus to be gone – they wanted him dead.

After the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples travel to Bethany where a very different scene unfolds. Jesus was at the home of someone known as Simon the leper. This was probably someone Jesus had healed, for he was now again a part of society and serving as host for Jesus and his

disciples. A woman came into the house fairly unnoticed. In other gospels she is identified as Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus. You may recall that Mary spent time at the feet of Jesus listening to his teachings. She also witnessed Jesus' power first hand as he raised her brother Lazarus from the dead. But here, Mary makes a bold a daring move that could have literally cost her life. She approached Jesus which was not allowed in her custom. She proceeded to break an alabaster jar of perfume and poured it on Jesus' head as she was preparing him for a very different road to travel - his path to the cross.

Mary's very presence in this house was a risk. She appears to be unaccompanied which was simply not allowed in traditional Jewish custom. But Mary seems to see what others cannot. Jesus will be killed and needed to be prepared for burial. A typical Jewish custom of the time was for a young,

unmarried woman to obtain a jar of expensive perfume to be used on herself in preparation for her marriage. She would be sending a message to her husband that she is presenting the best she has as part of their union. It may have been that jar of perfume that Mary used to anoint Jesus – she presented the best she had to Jesus.

It is not surprising that she was criticized for her actions. That perfume was worth an entire year's wage. Some of those in the room immediately attacked her by saying she should have sold that perfume and given the money to the poor. I doubt seriously that those who raised the criticism were interested in the poor at all. In John's gospel, Mary not only anoints Jesus' head but also his feet, and she dried them with her hair. The fact that she took down her hair was enough to have her put to death in her culture, for women were to keep their heads covered and

their hair concealed at all times. Jesus recognized her sacrifice, and defended her actions to those looking for excuses to discredit Jesus. Mary was honoring the son of God with an insight that seemed to escape everyone else. Mary recognized Jesus' teachings about his imminent death.

From here we begin the direct path that led Jesus to the cross. How could it be that in such a short time the crowds would go from shouting 'Hosanna' to shouting 'Crucify him?' For the chief priests and scribes, Jesus has already become an enemy. Recall that prior to this event, Jesus entered the temple and overturned the tables of the moneychangers. Jesus had literally upset their financial system. Great profits could be made, particularly during high holy days when peasants would come to the temple to pay tribute. Peasants were forced to buy specific sacrificial elements from those moneychangers who

routinely marked up the price in order to make a profit. At every turn, the poor and marginalized members of society had to bear the expenses of Roman occupation and temple corruption. Jesus put a very serious cog in their wheel of fortune. We must not underestimate the power and influence of the Jewish leaders of the time. And yet we also must recognize that Rome was also developing an interest in Jesus – he was beginning to cause trouble in their finely tuned gouging of the poor. Remember that Rome agreed to allow the Jewish leaders to maintain their authority if they also agreed to help Rome keep order and prevent any kind of disruption. Any message of hope to those being abused was not tolerated for long. Clearly Jesus' message of hope for a better life and life eternal did not fit into Rome's oppressive techniques. Jesus was not interested in meeting the demands of man. Jesus took his direction and guidance from a higher authority than Rome.

And so it begins – the passion of the Christ and the road to a criminal’s death on a cross. But we are members of the resurrection church. We know the ending of the story. We know the fact that Jesus died according to God’s plan to atone for our sins. At no point did Jesus deny his purpose. He did spend time in the garden asking God to take this cup from him – “yet not my will but yours be done.”

As we approach Holy Week, we are confronted with the darkest period in our Christian history – the death of God’s beloved son on a cross. The suffering and agony Jesus withstood cannot be fathomed. I have not seen the movie, “The Passion of the Christ”, but I understand it gets quite graphic with its depiction of the horror of Jesus’ death by crucifixion. I don’t think we can every fully comprehend the reality of Jesus’ actions when he willingly went to the cross for those who

persecuted him, and for us who often turn from his will for our lives. But we know the end of the story. We have privileged information – God’s love for us did not end at the cross. Jesus did not stay in a tomb. There is a light at the end of the tunnel.

As we travel through the darkness of this Holy Week, let us return to celebrate Jesus’ victory over death, hell, and the grave.

I hope everyone can join us for services on Thursday and Friday as we pause to reflect and remember the awesome love of Jesus through his sacrifice for us. And let us also return next Sunday to the ultimate celebration of victory. And the church said –

Amen.