

Joy Over Sorrow: Discipleship

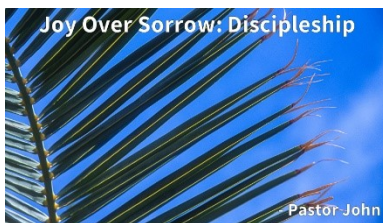
PALM SUNDAY

March 28, 2021

Mark 11: 1-11

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and 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. ³If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴*They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?"*

⁶They told them what Jesus had said and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹¹Then 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.



As we gather on Palm Sunday, we draw to a close in our Lenten worship series called "The Power of Sacrifice".

During this series we have witnessed to the power of the humble servant, Jesus Christ. We have also been called to model Jesus to others.

Our efforts in this arena have centered on the five habits in our Lenten book, Surprise the World. These habits are to bless others, to eat with others, to listen to the Holy Spirit, to learn Jesus, and to be sent ones. The underlying purpose of these habits is to help us lead highly questionable lives.



The overarching purpose of living highly questionable lives is to open paths to having faith or gospel conversations with others. Today we draw the season of Lent to a close as we step into Holy Week, which culminates on Easter Sunday. As we begin this time together this morning, let us begin with a word of prayer...



As we begin to explore how the concept of joy over sorrow plays into discipleship, we begin with one of the greatest examples of humble, sacrificial service. If you have a Bible with you or on your device or if you want to grab one from under your chair, please turn with me to Philippians 2. I'll be reading verses five through eleven. The passage divides into three sections.

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Here are the three sections. First, Jesus made himself nothing, being born in the likeness of men. We began the church year with the incarnation of God at Christmas time. Paul writes about this process,

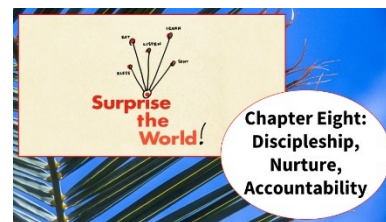


reminding us that Christ *"emptied himself, taking the form of a slave"*. To empty himself of all divinity, of all rights, to take on the role of a slave, to become one who placed the needs of God and others well before his own – this is our humble servant king. When Jesus had accomplished all that he came to do while he ministered among us, he then chose to become *"obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross"*. Completing his mission here on earth, Jesus willingly submitted himself to great pain and torture, dying a brutal death on the cross.



Last week, as we looked at our passage from John 12, this is what the human Jesus wrestled with in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew how difficult this road would be to walk. Yet standing at that crossroads, Jesus chose the difficult, hard road – walking the path to the cross for you and for me. And then, third, on Easter Sunday God raised Jesus from the grave, exalting him with *"the name above all other names"*. Paul continues in verse eleven, reminding us that because Jesus is exalted *"every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"*. The path that Jesus walked throughout his life on earth is the path we are called to walk – the path of discipleship, the road of humble service. As we gather at 6:30 for worship on Maundy Thursday we will dive deeper into the example of humble servant set by Jesus. And as we gather again at 6:30 on Good Friday, we will walk closely with Jesus as he endures the trial, the walk to Golgotha, the time on the cross, and finally as death comes to our Lord and Savior.

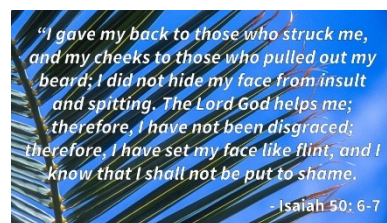
Before we delve back into the Bible, let us turn one last time to our Lenten book. In chapter eight Frost wraps things up. The chapter is titled "Discipleship, Nurture, and Accountability". In this final chapter author Michael Frost encourages us to form DNA groups. The "D" is for discipleship. In our small group we can talk about how we are living out the five habits and can creatively share our challenges, helping each other to find ways to better live out these habits. The "N" stands for nurture. As a caring and supportive group, we can encourage one another, lifting each other up during difficult times, cheering each other on in those seasons when we are struggling to live highly questionable lives. The "A" stands for accountability. As a small group we will be able to help each other keep our commitment to living these five habits as part of the regular, ordinary rhythms of our everyday lives. Meeting regularly, a small group is a great way to grow in our relationship with God and with one another.



These themes of discipleship, nurture, and accountability not only appear in our Lenten book, but they also are found in our lectionary passages for this week. The Old Testament reading is from Isaiah 50. In verses six and seven we read these words that we connect not only to Isaiah but also to Jesus and to those who follow him:

⁶ I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷ The

Lord God helps me; therefore, I have not been disgraced; therefore, I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.



As we talked about last week, when Jesus came to that crossroads, he walked the difficult road. When he came to stand before the religious authorities, Jesus again chose the difficult road. Jesus remained resolute, committed to the path of peace and love that he had always walked. Even in the face of this treatment, Jesus chose love. Jesus remained accountable to who he was at his core, setting the example for us to follow as his disciples. At times we too face challenges to our faith and to living out the example of Jesus. This is especially true in those times when faced with insult or derision or criticism. We can find great support and a place to process and learn from these experiences when we gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ for encouragement and to strengthen our relationship with Jesus.



A small group can nurture our faith as we walk together. Today's palm parade with the children was reminiscent of Jesus' triumphal entry long ago. The joyous entry into

Jerusalem boosted the spirits of the disciples. Cries of "Hosanna" were usually reserved for kings and prophets. Jesus goes along quite happily with thoughts of a new king, but was Jesus both? His disciples and followers certainly thought so. They longed for the return of freedom, longed to be rid of the Romans. Maybe Jesus was the one. Jesus nurtures these ideas so that the contrast of who he really is stands more sharply. People and disciples cry out for return of David – a great king! In verse 10 we hear this sentiment as we read, "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven*"! Jesus allows this to be the message of Palm Sunday. The events of the rest of the week stand in stark contrast, illustrating how radical his kingdom really was.

We heard a clear call to discipleship in our opening passage. In Philippians 2, verses five through eight, we were reminded of how Jesus made himself nothing, took on the role of servant or slave, and then humbled himself by going to the cross. During the season of Lent we have heard over and over the call to die to self, to take up our own cross, to practice these habits of humble service to others and to Jesus. Humility, service, sacrifice – this is discipleship.

Turn with me to Mark 11, our gospel passage for today. In the opening verses, one through seven, the two disciples went on ahead and did as Jesus said to do. They found that it was as he said it would be – every detail just as he had told them.



Here the power and divinity of Jesus are once again revealed. All was as he said it would be. Continuing on in the passage, in verse eight we read, *"Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields"*. As the parade continues, the excitement builds and the crowd shouts, *"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"*



The people are eager to receive a new king, a new version of mighty King David. Jesus enters with all of the correct trappings – riding on a colt, followers cheering him on with shouts used to welcome the king or prophet. The city was filling for the Passover. The energy was tangible. The people were ready for a new era, a new season in the life of Israel. Hopes were raised high once again as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, smiling and waving from the colt.

People everywhere find hope in systems and institutions of power. This was no different in Jesus' day. The Romans in Jerusalem trusted their system of power. The Jews trusted in the religious leaders and the Law. These systems, these institutions, they were the way it was. Into the status quo of the day, Jesus brings the upside-down kingdom. In Jesus' kingdom, hope and salvation are found in the Spirit's indwelling presence in the ordinary and unremarkable.

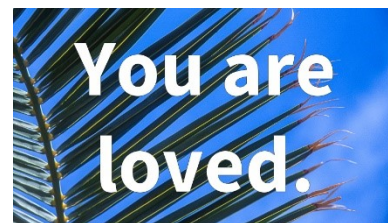


In the days after the triumphal entry, Jesus declares peace instead of war, self-sacrifice instead of violence, service instead of seeking to rule. Jesus chooses eternal

joy over short-term sorrow. Jesus chooses to build a kingdom based upon discipleship and relationship. The Romans and the religious leaders will not understand Jesus or his kingdom. They are not alone. The disciples and followers expected and wanted a messianic ruler, a mighty king. By the end of the week, Jesus will be arrested, tried, and killed without resistance, without calling for a revolt. The contrast is stunning. By Good Friday's conclusion, Jesus will lay down life to reveal an evil of empire and a religious system bent on preserving their own way of life.

Accountability leads us to do what is right. Discipleship empowers us to walk the hard road. Following Christ, we will demonstrate the power found in the way of love. Taking up our cross, we join Jesus in building the kingdom of God – the kingdom he established by paying the highest price, by giving his life.

On that first Palm Sunday, the disciples were rejoicing, celebrating, expecting victory. But the kingdom of God will not be led by a monarch on throne ruling over the people. It will instead be led by a servant who kneels at the feet of the poorest, sickest, most broken people and declares, "You are loved".



This is the subversive, upside-down kingdom we are called to mediate and bring in this season of Lent and throughout the year. As we consider our role in building this upside-down, radical kingdom may we too pause and consider: How alike we are to that first Palm Sunday crowd? How often do we come to church on Sunday, wave our proverbial palms, sing our version of "Hosanna!" and then return to the world as usual Sunday afternoon or Monday morning at best?

As we prepare to enter Holy Week, to journey to the upper room and into the garden on Maundy Thursday, to the temple and courts of power and on to the cross on Good Friday, may we pause to reflect on ways that we believe and participate in the false gospels rooted in power and privilege instead of sacrifice and service. As author Brandan Robertson writes, we must repent and turn from these ways, or we too will experience the sorrow that the disciples experienced this week - "for the systems of privilege and power cost nothing less than our lives". As we enter into Holy Week may we choose to walk with Jesus, knowing the cost will be high and the sorrow great. We do so because we are assured of the victory that will be won, declaring once and for all, "You are loved". Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As your faith has grown, how have you come to better understand God's upside-down kingdom? Why is this the 'way of love'?
- 2) *Pray*. Where is your life rooted in systems of power and privilege instead of in systems of sacrifice and service? Pray for a new way to see and live.
- 3) *Study*. Read Mark 14:1 through Mark 15:47. What items or facts stood out to you most as you read this Passion text?