

Is This A Fool's Dream?

L-BPalmSunday-09

Mark 11:1-11; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14-15 (selected)

April 5, 2009

^{NRS} **Mark 11:1** When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² 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. ³ If 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, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹¹ 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.

^{NRS} **Philippians 2:5** Let the same mind be in you that was ¹ 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.

^{NRS} **Mark 14:1** It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus ¹ by stealth and kill him; ² for they said, "Not

during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."...¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.¹¹ When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

²⁶ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.²⁷ And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'²⁸ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."²⁹ Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not."³⁰ Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times."³¹ But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated.³⁴ And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake."³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.³⁶ He said, "Abba,¹ Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."³⁷ He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?³⁸ Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;¹ the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.

¹ He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.⁴² Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none.⁵⁶ For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree.

⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?"⁶¹ But he

was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah,¹ the Son of the Blessed One?"⁶² Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses?⁶⁴ You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death.⁶⁵ Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by.⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth."⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt.¹ Then the cock crowed.²⁶⁹ And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them."⁷⁰ But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean."⁷¹ But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about."⁷² At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

15:1 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.² Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so."³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things.⁴ Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you."⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

¹² Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do¹ with the man you call² the King of the Jews?"¹³ They shouted back, "Crucify him!"¹⁴ Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!"¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters¹); and they called together the whole cohort.¹⁷ And

they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Today begins the final leg of the *procession* toward Easter morning. Some may think it looks like a "parade" with all the hoopla, waving of palms and shouting of "Hosannahs" as a famous man comes riding by like royalty. But it is not a parade. It is a procession from the entry into the Holy City until Jesus reaches his destined place at the site of the Cross at Golgotha. Parades last a few moments with a lot of flair and cost in the production of floats and all the other special events, like Macy's Thanksgiving Parade or even the Christmas Parades in Williamsburg and Richmond. Bands play, groups strut by proudly and Santa comes at the end, of course. This is not a parade today on Palm Sunday from the Mount of Olives. This procession will never end. It will be with us forever. The characters will not change roles or costumes. No new floats will appear to entertain

us. This procession has only one primary focus: Jesus lifted up on the cross so that all may look on and find healing and salvation.

In the 40 days of Lent we have had a more somber tone of reflection, confession, and seeking to know the holy one of God that has been sent to the world, not to condemn the world but to save the world, not just one part of the world but all of the world, all the people of all nations and races in every age. This is at the heart of God's declaration in Genesis when God beheld a creation that was not bad but was and always will be very good. God **did not make junk** - neither you nor me, nor the air we breathe, the land we walk, or the sea and water was junk in God's holy creation. We are the ones that have made this world junky with pollution of mind, heart and the environment. We are responsible for the place that has caused us to fear for our existence.

This time of Lent has challenged us to think more seriously about our life and the meaning of all creation and all God's

children. Fully one third to one half of the Gospels are devoted to this last leg of the earthly ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem in this time we call "Holy Week." Today begins our walk of **Holy Week** from the waving of Palms and shouting of fervent Hosanna's - cheers for the one who is expected to be the king - to the tragic time the crucifixion at Golgotha and the burial of his body in the tomb provided by Joseph of Aramethea. This is the terrible twist of human emotions and irrationality that goes so quickly from cheers to jeers!

This holy time begs the question, "*Was this a fool's dream?*" Had all the hopes and expectations from the prophets and disciples come to naught when Jesus refused to prevent his own demise? What good would his death do to the very people who needed him to lead, inspire, and save them from the tyranny of emperors and the powers and principalities of this fickle world?

The question is not what Jesus will do to save them from their fears of the moment by saving himself, **but** how he can truly save the world then and you and me now today so that we may truly have life and have it abundantly, joyfully and filled with hope. This must be lasting and enduring for all generations. This is the question of **why Jesus chose this walk of Holy Week** instead of some other easier path that would have been less painful and more of an exhibition of raw heavenly power.

The passion of Holy Week quickly moves to its end at Calvary. Turning of the tables in the Temple, false accusations, deceit, betrayal, bogus arrest, kangaroo courts before the priests, before Pilate and before Herod, and then the brutal scourging and suffering. It was not good way to complete a life of love and helping the lowly to be lifted up. It is no way to see the son of God treated so maliciously and intentionally.

Look at these slides. The journey begins with the steep descent from the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethesmane

with 2500 year old olive trees still standing where Jesus knelt to pray and disciples fell into sleep. The trees have survived wars and invasions where all the rest of the trees and landscape was destroyed or cut down. Only these trees stand. A church for All Nations is erected there to give witness of this stage in the journey toward the cross for humanity.

Look at the scourging. See the pain and hurt absorbed unjustly. Why is this necessary? What does it mean?

These are days not to give glib and easy answers. These are days to question ourselves about the role we play in making God's world into some kind of garbage dump. Why is that we do not take the time to meditate on God's glory until our backs are against the wall? In these days, we ask questions about greed and brutality. Why are we seduced to grasp and hoard money and possessions as if we can take it all with us when we die?

This beginning of Holy Week is not a time to avoid the pain and hurt that Jesus experiences because we can't stomach it. No,

this is a time to embrace the hurt and share the suffering of the world as God embraces sin for us.

Why are there so many mass murders today in schools and in civic centers? Why are there more people incarcerated per capita in the United States than in any other country? What drives our fears? Why are we not able to rehabilitate but rather prefer to lock up and throw away the keys as if we are tossing garbage out the window?

When do we stop and see human relationships as more important than things? When do we realize that we are servants not Lords? When do we begin to see every human being as a beloved child of God?

Holy Week demands us to consider our thoughts, motives and actions that led Jesus to Golgotha. Did he go there because of us, not just for us? Think about it in reverse. We may not be part of salvation unless we see our human tragedy in which we are the tragic characters in a deadly drama.

Come to the cross this week, then the tomb, then and only then come to the empty tomb to experience the power that conquers death. Then we can experience hope that drives out despair and leaves us filled with life alive in faith. Our faith is not in our own abilities but in the capability of God in Jesus to touch our hearts and minds.

Consider the hymn that we will sing this week, *Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?* What would we have done then and now to Jesus?