

Mark 11:1-11 ~ Philippians 2:5-11  
What are you doing?  
Palm/Passion Sunday ~ March 25, 2018  
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Why was everybody so excited? Well, apparently they thought at that moment in the brilliant sun on the streets of Jerusalem, that Jesus was finally going to save them the way they had expected him to all along. They thought, at last—yes, now we are going to get back the good old days of King David, back when we had political power and were in control of things. Back when they were the super-power of the region and the world, as far as they could see. Everybody likes to be, or longs to be, a super power. Yes? And they kept expecting Jesus to be that kind of hero all along: The Savior who would save them by restoring their political power and position just like when King David was on the throne. They were eager to get back to the good old days at last. “Hosanna! Hosanna! Save us now! Make us rich and powerful and at the top again. Wow, Jesus, is this it? Are you finally doing it?”

As you and I know on this side of the cross, close to 2000 years later (so, not a spoiler) they didn’t get what he was doing that day. Especially on that brilliant day of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, no one is noticing that the Jesus they want *is not* the Jesus riding through the center of town. Mark is subtle and ironic in the ways he makes this known to his readers. Did you get a look at him? Jesus wasn’t dressed in military dress uniform with buttons and stars. He wasn’t riding on a prancing tall horse with a fancy braided mane and tail, with ten horses ahead and ten horses behind. That was the parade on the other side of town. No, he is bumping along on the back of a borrowed colt, with someone’s coat for a saddle. And no, they didn’t get what he was doing that day. Do we?

Did you notice the way Mark described the colt as, “a colt that has never yet been ridden?” (v. 2) That’s another little clue that Jesus is about to go down a road never ridden before. He’s about to do something that had never been done in the history of the whole human race. He’s about to do something that no one expects or understands at the time. So while they were spot on with their Hosanna cry, “Save us, now!” at the same time, they were clueless about what salvation, Jesus-style, was really about.

Did you notice what Jesus said once he mounted the colt and made his big entrance? Take a look our “Call to Worship” scripture opening that Tracy read. What did he say? What was his big speech? What was his final rhetorical flourish addressed to this enthusiastic chaotic crowd? Here was a golden opportunity for him to explain his mission. But that’s right: he says nothing. You’ll notice as he moves closer and closer to his execution, Jesus says less and less.

The time for speech making is over. Jesus is teaching by doing. Every step he takes, he is fulfilling his mission on earth so that the whole world could be saved through him. But not the way they wanted or expected him to. The Jesus they

wanted, the one to make things right in their eyes and hearts, was not the Jesus that God sent them.

So what *are* you doing, Jesus? What are you doing bouncing along on that colt, right into the very city where you have enemies who have sworn to kill you, no matter what it takes? We will see on Thursday night, when we hear the reading of the passion narrative how quickly these crowds turn. When Jesus does *not do* what they expect, when he looks weak and beaten and bloodied, those adoring crowds of today's story will shout, "Crucify him!" The actions and the words of Jesus challenge and disorient us, too. Jesus opens our eyes to a whole new definition of power. Jesus pushes us forward, not to a nostalgic past, when churches were packed, or somehow we thought life was better. Instead he pushes us forward to new ways of experiencing death and resurrection, only made accessible to us through what Christ did that final week. Jesus pushes us to take courage and speak truth to power, no matter the cost.

Jesus' final week, his last week on this earth, remembered in scripture, song and sacrament on Thursday, Friday and Sunday services here, will reveal and remind just what kind of a super hero he is. He's and finally crucified so that he could save the world. So we could be healed and made whole. Just so we could see how Jesus' approach to justice works. He had to give it all up, that's what obedience to God called for.

The Apostle Paul grabbed an already popular hymn to quote in his letter to try and explain Jesus' what Jesus did to the new church in Philippi:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

What does this kind of obedience to God look like for us? Are you tired of fighting your ego? Or maybe you are tired of feeding it. Where is your mind right now? Do you wish you could just wake up and have the mind of Christ? That would be so cool. But I can tell you from my own daily walk with Jesus, praying and journaling almost daily for decades, along with earning a major in religion, a masters in divinity, and now a doctor of ministry degree--I've never woken up having already the mind of Christ. No matter what I do, I still wake up with the mind of

Laurie. Often my first thought for the past twenty-five years since I became a pastor, more often than no, my first waking thought is, “is it Sunday?” Once I’ve figured that one out, I won’t tell you all the other crazy worries, issues my mind can grab onto. I will tell you from my own experience, choosing to have the mind of Christ is a decision we have to make every day and sometimes every hour. And it is in our darkest, most desperate hours that Jesus can be most present to us. He has been there and is still there. That’s what Jesus did and is still doing.

What does this kind of obedience to God look like for us? What are we doing about it? I was moved to tears this past week by the words, the passion, the courage and the actions already taken by grieving Fred Guttenberg, father of Jamie Guttenberg, a 14 year old high school student gunned down in the back as she was running for her life from the shooter at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High school on February 14. Since that unspeakable loss, he has been speaking out to state and national level politicians to do something, at last, because “Weapons of war must be removed from our streets.” He is a hunter, a strong advocate of 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights-- who is advocating for sensible gun control. When asked by a news reporter where he gets the strength to fight this fight he said, it is the spirit of his daughter Jamie, “She is pushing me forward to do what’s right, no matter how tough it is. He is doing what he can to advocate for those 17 who lost all of their rights on Feb. 14. What are we doing?

At Saturday’s March for our Lives event at our nation’s capitol and in cities around the country, young people and their supporters were doing something important. They were speaking truth to power, asking those in political power to not just grieve and talk, but to act. An 11-year-old from Alexandria, Virginia, named Naomi Wadler riveted the crowd with her words, “I represent the African-American women who are victims of gun violence, who are simply statistics instead of vibrant, beautiful girls full of potential.” She is a fifth grader who was chosen to speak at the march after she organized a walkout at her elementary school on March 14 to protest gun violence and honor the lives of those lost in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting in Parkland, Florida. She also honored Courtlin Arrington a 17-year-old high school senior from Alabama who was shot and killed in school, just weeks after the Florida shooting.<sup>i</sup>

What are we doing? Looking beyond the issues we face here in our country, there are now more than 66 million people displaced by natural disasters and raging conflicts across the globe. Across the world the effects of climate change challenge the human family’s ability to nurture and promote a world in which there is enough for everyone.<sup>ii</sup> These are just a few of the problems crying out for action. People and the earth crying, Hosanna! Save us, Now. Not later. I hear Jesus asking us, “What are you doing?”

“Hosanna” is our call to action where it counts. That’s what Fred Guttenberg, Naomi Wadler, and Jesus are saying. There is no time for, nor did Jesus die so, we could just be dead men and dead women walking trudging through our daily grind,

running out the clock on the precious days God gives us to live and breathe on this earth. St. Irenaeus, the great second-century Greek theologian and Bishop, expressed the essence of our faith with this truth, well-worth learning by heart: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive!” The surest way to becoming fully alive is to take action, gutsy action in the name of Jesus’ divine compassion and justice: wherever we are, however we can.

You’ve heard the acronym, WWJD, “What would Jesus do?” Although it popped up in the 1990’s like it was a new a new idea, it actually comes from a slim Christian classic written one hundred years earlier, in 1896, titled *In His Steps: What Would Jesus do?* by Charles Monroe Sheldon. This is a centering and thought-provoking question, but difficult to really answer since no matter how hard we try, we can never actually *have* the mind of Christ. Today we will exit the sanctuary in silence without a benediction, to signal for us that this Holy Week service continues on Thursday night. I urge you to leave our worship thinking about a slightly different question. Not WWJD, but—“WDJD” - What *did* Jesus do?

Why did he ride that bumpy borrowed colt into the city he knew would kill him? That’s the “all-in,” self-emptying kind of Savior he is. But this is just the beginning of Jesus’ final week. Even if you never thought about worshipping here on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, this year, just do it. You will hear what else he did and didn’t do, said and didn’t say, that got him executed on a cross, the cruelest form of capital punishment in his day; a very political, very public execution. Staying with Jesus for his whole last week is the surest path toward a deeper, more fulfilling Easter. If you can’t make the services, take some time out at home to read the passion narrative.<sup>iii</sup>

Easter, next Sunday on April 1, will come and go. Walgreen’s and Wal-Mart will put away their Easter jellybeans and Easter grass... eventually. But how will you be changed by what Jesus did. How will you answer when Jesus asks you, “What are you doing?”

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<sup>i</sup> Jenna Amatulli, Trends Reporter, Huffington Post, March 24, 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> See Laurie A. Kraus, *Mission Mosaic Year in Review 2017*, PC(USA), Inside Cover article.

<sup>iii</sup> I will post the readings on the weekly calendar & news, e-blast for easy reference.