

He Comes Into His Own  
Mark 11:1-11, 15-19, 27-33

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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Mark 11:1-11, 15-19, 27-33

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

"Hosanna!

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

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

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.

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Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?

But you have made it a den of robbers."

And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me." They argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'Of human origin?'" —they

were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

We've been on our way to Jerusalem from the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark, back on December 29<sup>th</sup>. "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."<sup>1</sup> Like the beginning of Genesis, ""In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,"<sup>2</sup> this is a beginning.

We've heard several stories lately that come after the Triumphal Entry, so let me put this back into context. The last person to speak to Jesus before this passage is a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. He said to Jesus, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" He identified Jesus as the heir of King David. Jesus healed his blindness, and he started following Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus and his followers go up from Jericho through the suburbs of Bethphage and Bethany. Jesus sends two of his disciples to go get a colt that he knows will be tied up and waiting.

Jesus rides a colt, not a warhorse. He has not come as an enemy, to attack Jerusalem. He has not come to condemn the world, but to save it.<sup>4</sup> He rides a colt, like King David did, and King Solomon.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:1, NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:1. NRSV.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 10:46-52.

<sup>4</sup> John 3:16-17.

This is a colt that has never been ridden before. That matters here. When King Solomon was trying to secure his throne against his brother and rival Adonijah, he made a point of riding David's own mule on the way to be anointed as king.<sup>5</sup> That's like the new president riding in the Presidential limo in his inauguration parade. It helps establish in people's minds that the new president is like the old president.

Jesus, though, doesn't have a predecessor. There has never been another Son of God. So he rides a colt that has never been ridden before, coming into Jerusalem like a king.

The ordinary people of the city and the pilgrims from all over the region greet him like a king. They spread their cloaks on the road and cut branches and laid them down in the street, so that his steed won't have to walk on the hard cobblestones. They shout out "Hosanna," which means "Save us," and they bless Jesus and his coming to Jerusalem. They proclaim that he is coming in the name of the Lord.

They're right, but this isn't academic discussion. This borders on threatening revolution. The Roman Empire has a king. His name is Tiberius Caesar.

Then Jesus goes into the Temple, and starts driving out all the people who are selling things. He overturns the moneychangers' tables and throws out all the people selling the doves that Temple-goers need to make

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<sup>5</sup> I Kings 1: 32-40.

sacrifices. He quotes Isaiah about the Temple being a house of prayer for all nations, and Jeremiah about that the people in charge have made the Temple into a den of robbers.<sup>6</sup>

This goes a long way toward explaining why there is such panic at the Temple.<sup>7</sup> The high priests are afraid. That's why they do all the things they do this week. That's why they keep trying to find ways to derail Jesus or to separate him from his supporters. That's why they finally have him arrested and turn him over to the Romans to kill him.

They're not just afraid that Jesus will get rid of them. They are afraid of that, don't get me wrong. But they're also afraid that the Romans will see Jesus as a threat to Roman rule, and overreact.

In 146 BC the Romans razed Carthage to the ground, leaving not one stone standing on top of another, and sold the entire population into slavery. This is what the high priests, and, eventually, King Herod, are afraid of.<sup>8</sup>

Later, after Jesus' Resurrection, when the Romans respond to the First Jewish Revolt, they destroy Jerusalem. The Wailing Wall is the biggest portion of pre-70 AD Jerusalem that remains. They don't sell all the Hebrew people into slavery, but they scatter them around the whole Roman Empire, to keep them from getting a critical mass anywhere to create another rebellion. The Romans don't distinguish between Hebrew people who are

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11

<sup>7</sup> <sup>TM</sup>. Allusion to the band Panic! at the Disco is intentional.

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthago\\_delenda\\_est](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthago_delenda_est)

Christians and Hebrew people who aren't Christian. This is something that Jesus will tell his disciples is coming, once he's in Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> The high priests think that they can stop it from coming.

That's a comforting thing, believing that you can stop the world from changing.

To think that, if you just keep doing all the things you normally do, you can keep the world, or at least your portion of the world, exactly the same.

I see some bits of this belief in the churches<sup>10</sup> and other organizations<sup>11</sup> that keep meeting in person during this pandemic. They are risking the lives of their members and everyone with whom their members interact, their families, friends, and co-workers, even the cashiers at the grocery store, in order to preserve the illusion that nothing has changed in the world.

That has to be comforting.

It's just wrong, that's all.

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<sup>9</sup> Mark 13:1-8

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.katc.com/news/covering-louisiana/roy-moore-to-advise-central-pastor-holding-defiant-church-services>, <https://www.propublica.org/article/meet-the-pastors-holding-in-person-services-during-coronavirus>, <https://www.propublica.org/article/meet-the-pastors-holding-in-person-services-during-coronavirus>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/03/30/neo-confederate-group-moves-ahead-conference-amid-covid-19-outbreak>.

While we may not want to hear it, and church may be the last place we expect to hear it, the world is changing, and it is going to change more in the future. The Roman Empire changed significantly the lives of the people who lived in Judea. The early church was scattered with the Hebrew people from Judea throughout the Empire and beyond.

God did not do that. The Emperor did that. But God used that forced scattering to spread the Church a lot further than it would have gone immediately otherwise. In one generation Christianity spread with the Jewish people from France to North Africa and as far away as India.<sup>12</sup> Jesus told his disciples to make disciples of all nations, and then God gave them opportunities to do it.

God did not send COVID-19 to punish anyone. Bad things happen sometimes, like hurricanes and floods and tornadoes.

But I believe that God can use it.

Jesus taught us what God wants us to do. Love God, love our neighbors, and let both of those loves show in everything that we do.

We have opportunities now to love God and love our neighbors like never before.

I urge you, spend time in prayer, every day. If you have the time, that's wonderful. Invest that time in time with God. If you would tell me you

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<sup>12</sup>[https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/index\\_section8.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/index_section8.shtml), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/how-christianity-came-to-india-kerala-180958117>

don't have time, well, Martin Luther once explained that he normally spent two hours a day in prayer, but he was so busy at that moment that he had to pray for three hours. Because "The less I pray, the harder it gets; the more I pray, the better it goes."

And love your neighbors. Please, do the whole six-foot physical distancing thing. But reach out with your words. Call people. Email.

Don't go out unless you need to. If you have to go out, wear a mask. Cloth masks won't do much, they tell me, to help keep you from getting sick, but, if you have the virus and you don't know it yet, they will help keep you from spreading it to other people.<sup>13</sup> That makes wearing a cloth mask, even if you feel fine, the most loving thing you can do.

During this pandemic, we are finding new ways to connect with each other. Who would have foreseen two months ago that we would be meeting by teleconference? Not me. Who knows what opportunities we'll find in the next weeks?

This pandemic will not be forever. This time may pass like a kidney stone, but it will pass. In a few years what we will remember is not boredom, but the connections we made through discussions six feet apart, and telephone calls, and the Internet.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.dispatch.com/zz/news/20200404/how-to-make-your-own-face-mask-to-help-stop-coronavirus-spread>

We will be back together in person. I'm looking forward to that day so much. And, on that day, much more than anything we said, we will remember how other people made us feel. We will remember acts of love and grace.

I pray that that day comes soon, and that there are lots of those to remember.

Amen.