

Mark 11:1-10

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!" (NRSV).

If this was just a story, today's Scripture would make a perfect climax. The protagonist goes from a pauper to a king. A poor man from a little village is misunderstood by virtually everyone around him, stands firm on faith against evil, and stands firm on integrity against a corrupt religious establishment. He teaches valuable lessons that closely resemble Old Testament themes about the will of God and the love of God, and encourages people to surrender their desires and help those in need. He becomes very popular and has a lot of people following him wherever he goes. If the story ends here it would make a great novel. He is triumphant and they all live happily ever after. But it's not just a story. Jesus is on a very important divine mission.

The dominant factor of the political environment was Rome's conquest to take over the world and secure its resources. Israel was in a different position than the other countries. It was predominantly ruled by its religion. So, they were mostly left alone by Rome and only ruled by a puppet king with a small garrison of soldiers. As a consequence they were under a heavy tax burden and lived under the threat of invasion if there was ever an uprising or disturbance. The environment was one of reluctant complacency whereupon the people were basically unhappy and didn't want the Romans there. As a consequence the religious establishment tried to maintain the status quo and avoid any civil unrest. Entering into this cultural dynamic is Jesus. He has God centered theology and is focused on the love of God and the will of God above all else. Therefore, he sees that the religious structure is off centered theologically and more self-serving than God centered. The religious leaders are primarily concerned with the self-preservation of their power dynamics instead of being obedient to the will of God. As a consequence, the religious leaders do everything within their power to try to stop Jesus. They fail at every attempt because they are going against God and there is nothing else that they can do.

There are two basic things that are happening in today's Scripture - what Jesus said, and what actually happened. Jesus said "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.'" What actually happened is exactly what Jesus said. This knowledge of future variables of human interaction shows his divine status.

Mark is loaded with significant information. Jerusalem is the ultimate destination of Jesus. This, of course, is scriptural prophecy. Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice ... Jerusalem...your king

comes to you, triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey (NRSV). Approaching Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives is also scriptural prophecy. Zechariah 14:4 on that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives (NRSV). The colt was needed for a sacred purpose. A colt that has never been ridden is a match for consecrated animals of the Old Testament. Humility and peace are demonstrated by the type of animal that Jesus rode in on because warriors and ruling kings rode in on horses. Saying that the Lord needs it shows Jesus identity as the most exalted status and that status is not challenged. Promising to return the animal right away shows a contrast to warriors and rulers that confiscated animals to serve their purpose without concern for the owners. The cloaks and leafy branches show how Jesus is given the red carpet treatment of an expecting king. The crowd problem continues but now they have changed. The audience still does not understand the true nature of Jesus. They want Jesus for the wrong reasons. They expect the installation of a new king to restore Jerusalem and Israel to its former glory. The crowd greets Jesus with words from Psalm 118:25-26 Save us...Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD (NRSV).

Jesus is big news. The crowd gets excited. They want a great warrior like King David. The triumphant entry into Jerusalem is comparable to a victorious military conquest. One important thing that we can take from the Scripture is that most of the people are in the crowd but crowds are not reliable. It is much harder to stand alone on positions of integrity. What we can do is follow Jesus and stand firm in faith against evil and stand firm on integrity against corruption. God gives God's own Son to us. This is a fantastic offering, a tremendous gift of love. What can we give to God?