

We Come in the Name of the Lord
Palm Sunday Communion Meditation
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras

Mark 11:1-11

When I was in my 20's and just out of college, I remember yearning to find my life's passion, something that would transport me away from all the uncertainties, self-doubts and questions of young adulthood and catapult me into the BIG life I was predestined for.

Trouble was, I never quite figured out what my BIG life was meant to be! Maybe I would write the next great American novel that would change the world. Or perhaps the great big thing I was meant to do would involve leading a transformative social movement and make history.

My glorious fate continued to elude me.

In the meantime, a funny thing happened. I kept making all those lesser decisions, some of them so quickly that I wasn't even aware that I was making them.

And as the years passed, I became so busy with the way my life was turning out. Changing diapers became schlepping my daughter to dance class, and my son to karate, eventually that became high school band for her and track practice for him. And there were always bills to pay, work to do, calls to return, and those taxes to try and get done on time.

Somewhere along the line, I stopped imagining that I was meant to play a leading role on the world's center stage. I was just too busy trying to keep up with the life I was given. In so doing, I became a member of the crowd.

And that's OK, because I've come to understand that even if I never get to write that book, or give that lecture, or preach at a large church event, God still has a role for me to play, even if it's just a bit part.

Mark's rendering of Palm Sunday story has me thinking about of all this. It's one of the stories that all four Gospels recount, but not in exactly the same way. Each offers their own distinctive, peculiar and valuable insights to the story.

Mark's focus seems to center in on how Jesus sent two disciples to get him a colt, indeed, almost 2/3 of Mark's story revolves around the mundane details of securing Jesus' mode of transportation.

Where are they to find the animal?

What kind of colt should they seek?

How are they going to take it?

What might they say to the anyone who questions them?

Imagine you're the disciples sent on this errand... *"How'd I get stuck on donkey detail? I really don't want to go! What if I miss something big that's about to happen? I'd have hoped for a more important role on a day like this."*

Mark doesn't say, but I like to imagine that the donkey detail was given to James and John. Remember them? Just hours earlier, they'd come to Jesus asking that he grant them the two highest seats of honor in his Kingdom— one at his right hand and the other at his left. Instead, they'll be sent out to look for the humblest mode of transportation, and will probably have to sweep up some droppings on the way!

Come on, folks.... That's kind of funny, isn't it?

Jesus teaches all his disciples that to be great is to be the servant of all. Probably they all needed to hear that message. I'm sure that James and John weren't the only ones jockeying for position.

Later that same week, in John's version of the story, at their Thursday night meal, Jesus acted out a similar point by washing the disciples' feet and giving them a new commandment, that they love one another to such a degree and in such a way that no one could be more important than anyone else.

Do you see what he's trying to get at here? It's Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem as the Messiah. He's the Messiah. None of the rest of us are... and perhaps there's some reassurance and comfort in that.

When you think about, Palm Sunday was, as one writer put, a premature victory parade; people gathered in the streets to see something extraordinary. It reminded me of the crowd gathered this week as the USS Comfort landed in New York City. Everyone who is there, thinking they're going out to see a battle that needed to be won. Unaware that it would instead be about healing.

We are, all of us, in the midst of a pandemic. It has, and will continue, to change the way we live. In the meantime, what will get us through is holding one another in prayer. And celebrating the good we see around us, no matter how small or insignificant.

This doesn't mean that we should have a victory parade just yet – especially when we're all confronting grief and anxiety so directly. To do so would feel empty and shallow.

And we've already seen the brokenness presented as an excuse for evil racist attacks, or the righteous violence of those who spit on food or knowingly violate the social distancing rule – Peter's anger in the garden seems way more present these days.

I want reconciliation, I want healing. I want us to all act like Easter is coming. Not according to any human calendar or calculation, but because we know that Peace is our ultimate end goal. I want to work towards the healing of the world, because it's the right thing to do. And I'm guessing you do too.

Our lives, on their own, may never turn the world upside down. But your humble effort put together with my little effort, and all our efforts adding up over time... the Gospel promises, all these matter immediately and even more so, ultimately.

And the good news is you don't even have to be the drum major or a baton twirler to join this parade!

Jesus' disciples... sure, they are sent to preach and teach and heal. But think about how much more often they're having to do lesser, more humble tasks. Fetching a donkey. Counting how much food is on hand. Setting a table big enough for everyone.

Jesus, in offering us advice about how to get through all of life's multiplicities and ambiguities is pretty straight-forward when he says... "Follow me."

The assembled crowd called out to Jesus, "*Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

Through food drives and phone calls, we come in the name of the Lord.

Through social media and online worship, we come in the name of the Lord.

Through our prayers for all who serve and all who suffer, all who give care and who need it, all who cry out for salvation, we come in the name of the Lord.

God in Christ needs all of us to help move this procession ahead. Beloved, if you have any clue about where or how you have been called to serve, this Palm Sunday encourages and invites you to apply your creativity. Remember that God is in every mucky stable, on the forgotten corners and cul-de-sacs, in the ER's and the pop-up medical tents, and wherever else salvation is taking place. Amen.