

“In Between Time”
Mark 11:1-11
March 25, 2018 Palm Sunday
The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

I love parades, don't you? When Kendall, our youngest daughter lived at home, it was always a special time on Thanksgiving Day to get up and watch the Macy's parade, or on New Year's Day to watch the Rose Parade from Pasadena. I have to admit that I like the Rose Parade better, because the Macy's parade, although the balloons are great, has too many performances that stop the parade, advertizing some Broadway musical that I will never see. But Kendall would watch the parades for the bands. For her there was nothing better than a good marching band. We always went to parades as kids in Colorado and I soon learned that parades were really of two different kinds. The first kind of parade was a celebration of something that had happened. One of my very early memories is of the parade that we had in Boulder to celebrate the Mercury astronaut, Scott Carpenter, who was born and raised in Boulder. The parade was after his orbital mission and I was so excited to see it because his Mercury capsule was part of the parade on a flatbed truck. It was a celebration. The other kind of parade is an anticipation. It is about something that is coming. As a kid in Boulder we always went to the Pow Wow parade. That was the parade that went through downtown Boulder to advertize the Boulder Pow Wow, the annual rodeo that took place every summer over four days at the Fairgrounds. That parade would not only have marching bands, but they would have lots of horses and cowboys and plenty of clowns. It was an anticipation of what was to come.

On the first day of the week, Jesus and his disciples paraded into Jerusalem. It probably wasn't the only parade that day. “It is the time of the annual Passover celebration. The city of Jerusalem is filled to capacity with Jewish pilgrims and tourists who have arrived from all over the Roman Empire. The Roman governor, who otherwise resides in Caesarea on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, comes up to Jerusalem for this occasion every year. He does not make the trip because he is interested in the holy days, but because he is in charge of crowd control. In the past, more than once the huge gatherings of

people have shown their anger and frustration against the Roman occupation, and the military power has come in to restore order. After all, Passover is the Jewish celebration of liberation from the unjust and cruel domination system of pharaonic Egypt.

When the governor Pilate comes into Jerusalem, he enters the city from the west with an excessive show of military pomp and circumstance. He leads a large group of cavalry and foot soldiers, and rides an impressive stallion. He is the highest representative of the imperial power of Rome in the area. Pilate represents the emperor himself, the “son of God,” “lord of all,” and “savior of the world.” His entry into Jerusalem is clearly a demonstration of the ever-present Roman power.” His parade is a celebration of imperial Rome.

On the east side of town, Jesus and his friends enter the city. Jesus has organized some things in advance. Two disciples get the young donkey that Jesus has arranged for them to use. Jesus has planned a demonstration that is as different as it can possibly be from Pilate's demonstration on the other side of town. The donkey Jesus rides mocks Pilate's powerful horse. Instead of weapons, they wave palm branches. This is a joyful group of people that cheer and laugh, in contrast to the silent crowds watching Pilate and the Romans arrive. This parade is about a peaceful king. This is not really a celebration, it is an anticipation.

We gather here on Palm Sunday also in anticipation, because we live in an in between time. Not just this time between Palm Sunday and Easter, but in a time that needs to rediscover hope. That's what filled the people on that Palm Sunday, hope. Not that the kingdom had arrived yet, but that it was on its way. Do we feel that way? Are we hopeful about the future? When Jesus came riding into the city that day, the people were overcome with the deep and abiding hope that the prophetic promises would be fulfilled, and the kingdom would be restored. They were waiting for a Messiah to save them; they were hoping against hope that the world would be turned upside down and God would right what was wrong. Do you feel that way? Do you trust that God is in control and that even though it may feel that Good Friday with all its pain and despair are so often part of our world, that Easter is coming? We live in an

in between time. This morning, if you take part in our “Walk through Holy Week,” you'll do some activities that remind us of things that Jesus and the disciples went through during that week. But you'll also see some “wondering questions,” questions that we hope will make you wonder what it was like that week. What was it like to be in the parade that day? I wonder what we would have felt listening to Jesus teach in the Temple? I wonder what it would have been like to be in the upper room on Thursday night? I wonder how it would have been to be Judas, to be convinced you're doing the right thing, except that right thing is to betray your friend? What would that week have been like if you didn't know Easter was coming?

There was once a very faithful, active, urban church that opened its doors to those on the margins of society, including those who were homeless. One day a mentally deranged man made his way into the church office and threw a brick at the receptionist, hitting her in the face. After she was admitted to the hospital, the entire church staff gathered around the communion table, held hands, and offered prayers on behalf of their sister, friend and colleague.

The pastor recounted that he began with a very Presbyterian prayer, full of the right words, asking that God's will be done, praying for strength, and even praying for the poor, mentally ill perpetrator. Then the janitor began to pray. The prayer began with gratitude, “for waking me up in the morning for the sun that is shining, or the food I was able to eat at breakfast.” But then the prayer moved from praise to petition. Not the “nice” petitions in the pastor's prayer, but hard-core demands on God. “God we expect you to heal our sister! Make her well. Bring her back to full health.” On and on the janitor went, beseeching God to deliver his friend, expecting God to be God.¹

Those are the prayers we lift up in this in between time. When God's kingdom is coming but not here yet. We still expect God to be God and have the future in his hands. Those who walked through holy week went from the joy of Palm Sunday to the despair of Good Friday and they didn't know Easter was coming. But they knew that God was God, and they could trust in that. They could trust in him. Do

1 Montgomery, Stephen R. *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*, p. 150.

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