

Palm Sunday – March 25, 2018

Mark 11:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I got close to buying an Amazon Echo speaker this week. Do you know that that is? It's a speaker that you can talk to and tell it to play music, or write you a shopping list, or search the web. If you have the right setup in your home it can even turn on and off your lights for you, or change the setting you your thermostat. Why did I get close to buying this smart speaker? Well, I've been a subscriber to Audible for several years now, which is the leading provider of audio books, and they are offering their long-term subscribers a \$25 discount at the moment on one of these speakers. That means I could get the cheapest version of the Echo smart speaker for \$25, which I thought was a pretty good deal. But I wasn't completely sold on the idea, and I wasn't sure why I needed one. We already have a wireless speaker for our devices, and it isn't that difficult to press a few buttons to bring up some music or a podcast to listen to. Finally, after talking to both Helen and James, I finally decided that just because I *could* get one didn't mean I *should*, and that really, I didn't need a speaker I could talk to. Still, I'm kind of taken with the idea of a smart home, where all of your utilities and appliances are centrally controlled and monitored by computer, so I'm not saying I'm *never* going to buy something like a smart speaker.

I use this recent experience of mine to illustrate what I think is true of most of us in one way or another. We are easily caught up in fads that promise to make our lives better. Fifteen years ago, low-carbohydrate diets like the Atkins Diet were all the rage, and they seemed to help people lose weight. But before long it became clear that they could lead to health problems, and that they weren't sustainable over a long period of time. More recently the Paleo Diet has gained a following, but that too seems to have lost its luster. I'm sure there will be another one that will pop up before too long. And that's because we are continually in search of the silver-bullet solution, that "one simple trick" that will solve our problems. What's true for diets is true for politics and the economy as well. We've been offered "trickle-down economics," globalized free trade, and democratic socialism as utopian visions that will bring stability and prosperity. But while it's true that some approaches are better and more just than others, it is doubtful that any one of them will be the magic pill that will make everything better.

And speaking of pills, that's another whole area that reinforces my point. We have become accustomed to thinking that we can cure our unhealthy lifestyles by finding the right medicine, or the right dietary supplements. And there is no end to folks who are happy to sell us on that promise.

What does all of this have to do with Palm Sunday? Where could I possibly be going with this? I want to suggest that Palm Sunday fits right into the pattern I've been talking about. For a brief moment, Jesus seems like he will be the solution to all the trouble faced by his people. They have been oppressed by the Roman occupiers and collaborators like Herod. Suddenly there arises among them this rabbi who has been talking about the kingdom of God coming near. He's been curing illnesses, casting out demons, and challenging the religious authorities. Some say he might even be the long-promised Messiah, the one who will finally restore the kingdom of Israel to its former glory. Surely *that's* what he means by the kingdom of God. Maybe he will be able to kick out the Romans and depose their lackeys. Maybe he can bring true justice and true peace to God's people.

But this won't last long. In just a few short days Jesus will be betrayed by one of his followers and become a prisoner of the Romans. And as soon as that happens, the crowd will

turn against him. One day they're shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and a few days later that are shouting "crucify him!" He has become just one more disappointment. One more dashed hope. One more discredited fad. They'll take out their frustration on him as he is crucified, and then they'll be back to business as usual, waiting for the next one to give them a glimmer of hope.

The Gospel according to Mark is full of irony, and one of the ironies is that the crowds who hail Jesus as their savior in our gospel reading this morning are actually right, even though they don't realize it. But while they are looking for a political and military savior, Jesus will instead take on the real root of their problems, the powers of sin, death, and evil. Jesus understands that the military solution that his people want would only end up aiding and abetting the cosmic powers that prop up their oppressors. In other words, fighting the Romans would only be feeding the beast. So instead he does the only thing that will ultimately overcome them. He refuses to play their game by being a conventional enemy and instead becomes their victim. He will let them do their worst. But in doing their worst they will come to find that it wasn't enough, and that in this unconventional battle they will come out the losers. Their power will be broken and God's love and mercy will prevail.

Today we join the voices of the crowds in our gospel reading, shouting our Hosannas and recognizing Jesus as our savior. But we do so with our eyes open, looking down the road to the cross that we know is his destination as God's true Messiah. Though not, of course, his final destination. Throughout all of the drama of this coming Holy Week we know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, that Jesus' death leads to resurrection, and to new, more genuine, more authentic, and more abundant life, life that belongs to us as well since we are joined to his death and resurrection in Holy Baptism.

As Jesus heads down the road to the cross, he calls us to follow in his footsteps. It will not be an easy road to walk. The life that Jesus calls us to is infinitely better than the life we live in captivity to sin, but it is not a comfortable or an easy life. The cosmic powers that Jesus takes on in his death and resurrection will not go down quietly. They will fight tooth and nail. And we are called in our baptism to resist them because Jesus' victory gives the power to do just that. It enables us to be like him in refusing to play the game of fighting fire with fire, evil with evil, hate with hate. It enables us to cut through the status games, the wealth games, and the power games, to care for and advocate for the marginalized and the weak, the exploited and the vulnerable, demonstrating with our lives that God has not given up on the world or anyone in it, that God in Jesus loves us to death and back again.

Holy Week is upon us, the week in which the great drama of God's salvation of the world plays itself out over four days of worship. I hope you'll take advantage of the richness of our tradition and use it to enrich your faith in trust in God's love for you and for the whole world. May God be with us as we complete our Lenten pilgrimage. And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.