

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“Being in Time with the Lord’s Time”**

Mark 11:1 – 11

Palm Sunday

March 29, 2015

I still remember the day that Sylvia and I first laid our eyes on the campus of Princeton Theological Seminary. We’d taken a week to make the long drive from Southern California to central New Jersey... following our AAA Triptik all the way to Pennsylvania. From Pennsylvania, we had meticulous, handwritten, guaranteed foolproof directions from some church friends who’d moved to Princeton the year before... which our friends promised would bring us right to the very gates of the seminary.

And I’m sure they would have... except that our friends’ meticulous, handwritten, guaranteed foolproof directions forgot to tell us that we were supposed to take exit 351 off the Pennsylvania Turnpike... in fact, they didn’t tell us that we had to exit the Turnpike at all! So, we went sailing right on through Pennsylvania, and over the Delaware River Bridge, and right on into New Jersey... about 35 miles south of where we were supposed to be.

And, if you know anything about driving in New Jersey, you know that the highway system has been strategically designed to make it impossible to figure out how to get anywhere, unless you already knew how to get there in the first place... which, of course, we didn’t. So, two minutes into our new life in New Jersey... we were lost. Although, we didn’t yet realize that we were lost, because at that point we still hadn’t figured out that we’d missed our exit on the turnpike. For the moment, we still thought that we were where we were supposed to be... even though, by now, none of our written directions were matching up with what we were seeing with our own eyes.

Now, the only thing worse than being lost, is being lost and not realizing that you’re lost; because, you’re thinking, *“if I just go a little bit farther, or make a couple more turns, eventually these directions I’m looking at will start to make sense.”* But that never happens, because, by now you’re 50 miles away from where the directions are telling you you should be. And by the time it dawns on you that you are, in fact, *lost*... you’re so completely turned around that you’ve got a better chance of finding Pluto, than you do of finding whatever town it is you’re trying to get to.

Well, that’s the situation that Sylvia and I were in, as we futilely attempted to locate Princeton Seminary. And, after a half-an-hour of jug-handles, and exiting right in order to go left, and all the other joys unique to the Garden State driving experience... Sylvia finally convinced me to stop at a gas station and ask for directions.

So, I stop and say to the guy at the gas station, *“Yeah, I’m, uh, trying to get to Princeton.”* And he’s like, *“Princeton! Princeton? You’re nowhere near Princeton! Hey, Donnie! How do you get to Princeton? This guy is lost!”*

Anyway... somehow, some way, we eventually made it to the seminary. But by the time we arrived, it was getting late. The sun was starting to set. Everything was closed. So, we drove onto the campus; looked around a little bit; made a few mental notes; and then made our way to

our apartment at the married student housing complex... full of all the things we wanted to do, and see, and experience the next day.

I was reminded of our end-of-the-day arrival in Princeton, as I reflected on our Scripture lesson today from the Gospel of Mark... in which we're told that Jesus Himself arrived in Jerusalem as the afternoon was coming to a close. Not that Jesus had been lost, or somehow unable to locate the Holy City. No, He knew quite well where He was going, and He had no trouble finding it... it's just that, by the time He arrived in town on that first Palm Sunday, and made His way to the temple, it was already late in the day. So, as Mark tells us in the text, Jesus *"looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve."*

Now, hundreds of times over the years, I've read this verse about Jesus triumphantly entering Jerusalem, making His way to the temple, and, because it was late, just taking a quick look around before returning to His base in Bethany... and paid virtually no attention to it. Maybe it's struck you the same way, too. Because, on the surface, it seems like a trivial point... an unimportant detail just thrown in there by Mark, to add some texture to the story. I mean, Jesus came... He saw... and He went back home 'til tomorrow. Okay... fine! What's the big deal? What difference does it make? Well, it doesn't seem to make any difference.

Until we remember that huge crowd that welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem, on that first Palm Sunday. Remember those guys? Remember what they were doing? Remember what they were saying? They were cheering Jesus on, like He was some kind of first century rock star. They were rolling out the red carpet for Him, like he was Leonardo DiCaprio, arriving at the Academy Awards. They were crying out, "Hosanna!" Which, in Hebrew, means "Save!"

Okay, save from what? Save from who? Well, if you're a first century Jew, living in the Holy Land, hoping that God's Messiah was going to come some day and *save* you... what you mean is *"Save us from the Romans! Save us from their oppression! Save us from their blasphemous, gentile, paganism!"*

And how did those people think that Jesus, this would-be Messiah, was going to do that? Well, look at what else they were saying out on the road that day:

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

Which is theological shorthand for saying: *"Blessed is the Messiah who's going to come and rout the Romans, eradicate our enemies, and restore the magnificent monarchy of the great King David!"*

That's what everyone was hoping for. That's what everyone was looking for. That's what everyone was waiting for. And, brother, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, and walked up into that temple... that's what they thought He was going to do. Right then... right there... right now! The setting sun be darned! The Kingdom of God has come... and we're going to enjoy its spoils!

And it was within that electrified context of anticipation, and expectancy, and champing at the bit enthusiasm that Jesus walked into the temple... took a look around... put His hands on His hips... and said: *"Okay. I'm going back to the hotel. See you guys later."*

And the air went out of that crowd, like a Goodyear Blimp-sized balloon. We can just imagine the confusion, the frustration, the irritation of that crowd... as they watched their hero, their champion, their number one contender for the crown, climb back onto His donkey, and ride

back out of town. The people wanted Jesus to act **NOW!** But Jesus told the people, **now** is not the time.

And, as we know, it got even worse for those folks who'd been waving palm branches earlier. Because, the next morning, when Jesus returned, not only did He not fulfill those lofty expectations of Davidic glory and military might; He marched back into the temple and, without a moment's hesitation, started turning over tables, and flogging the moneychangers, and booting the people selling sacrificial animals out the door on their fannies, and telling the whole bloody lot of them to "*take the train, fools; you've turned my Father's house of prayer, into a hideout for thieves!*"

In other words, with His actions, Jesus was saying "*I'm not here to drive out the Romans and save you from their oppression; I'm here to drive out the evil of your own hearts, and save you from your terminal alienation from God.*"

Now, this was the most jarring, shocking, in-your-face thing that Jesus ever did. And it was, more than anything else, the catalyst for his eventual arrest and crucifixion; and it was the act that caused a lot of His followers to seriously begin to wonder, "*Maybe this isn't the Messiah that we were looking for!*" But it was also the first link in the chain of Holy Week events, that would ultimately result in Jesus' death on the cross... and His subsequent resurrection on Easter.

All of which would establish God's kingdom in a way far greater than anything ever realized by King David; and which would bring to all of us salvation, not just from earthly oppression, but from everything that threatens to separate us from our Heavenly Father. But if the crowd had had it's way on Palm Sunday... none of it would have happened; and Jesus would never have become, for us, the Lord and Savior that we truly need.

This morning, we've re-enacted our own little welcome of Jesus to Jerusalem. We've waved our palm branches, rolled out our red carpet, and sung our songs of hosanna. We have our own sense of anticipation; and hope; and excitement that Jesus is going to do something great, and grand, and glorious. But, like the crowd on that first Palm Sunday so long ago, we also have our demands... and our expectations... and our timetables for what the Lord must do, and when He must do it.

Sometimes Jesus doesn't do things when we want, or the way we want... and we, like that crowd, wonder if He's really the loving Savior that He's cracked up to be. Sometimes Jesus moves in a direction different from what we'd hoped or expected... and we worry, and doubt, and fear that we've gone off course somehow.

So, as we make our way into Holy Week, let's do our best to give over our expectations to our Lord's providential care. Let's make a special effort to trust that Jesus knows what He's doing... that, no matter which direction life takes, that He is right there with us, every step of the way. Let's try to keep ourselves in time with our Lord's time... and believe, with the full wealth of conviction, that when the time is right, our Lord **will** bring about our good.

That is, after all, the great and glorious message of Easter... toward which we are moving, one small step at a time. May we hold that message in our hearts, each and every day of our life.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!