

Date: March 28, 2021 (Palm Sunday)

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

Title: MAKING GOD VISIBLE

For most of his ministry, Jesus did all he could, to discourage his disciples from publicizing his work. The last thing Jesus needed or wanted was a marketing genius hyping his ministry. But when you're a man who can heal the sick, raise the dead and feed the five thousand, it's difficult to keep the word from getting out.

So, we have today's dramatic text from Mark 11. Jesus and his disciples are drawing near to the holy city of Jerusalem. They came to the villages of Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of his disciples into one of the villages where, he said, near the entrance to the village, they would find "a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it," he said, "and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

The two disciples did as Jesus instructed. They went into the village and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway just as Jesus said they would. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them continue with their assignment. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. He was ready to ride into the city, not in triumph, but in great humility.

Then, Mark says, something extraordinary happened. Many people along the way spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

It was a scene of great joy and wondrous anticipation. **But, it was based on misguided expectation.**

When the people along the way, saw Jesus riding a colt approaching Jerusalem, they immediately thought that Jesus would enter the city to smash, shatter and break up the established order. They thought it would be a showdown between Jesus and the Roman officials. This was what they wanted; this was what they were hoping for. "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" rang out everywhere.

Hosanna is an interesting word. It's not a word you're likely to hear any other day of the year except, Palm Sunday.

Pastor Steven D. Spencer says that years ago, when his youngest son was about 3 years of age, the boy was frustrated and angry, as they left church. His face was all scrunched up; his cheeks puffing with breaths of displeasure. When they finally made it to the Narthex of the church, Steven asked him: "Philip what's wrong?"

Phillip replied, "I thought we don't sing about Santa Claus in church."

"What, what do you mean, son, we don't sing about Santa Claus in church?" his father asked in dismay.

To which Philip responded: “Then why did we just sing, ‘Ho Santa, Ho Santa, Ho Santa in the highest?’”

We can appreciate young Philip’s confusion. Hosanna, is not a word, found in our daily lexicon. It’s a word we associate with church. Hosanna can be translated as “Save us, now!”

The people were asking Jesus, to over throw their Roman oppressors, and restore the throne of David, as the legitimate rule over Israel, and to do it, right away. The palm branches also had a specific symbolic meaning. Two hundred years earlier, Simon Maccabeus had defeated foreign armies and kept Israel independent. When he rode into Jerusalem, the people shouted cheers and waved palm branches, because he was looked upon as a deliverer. If Jesus was the Messiah, the people expected, no less from him. So the people were bubbling up with enthusiasm, but sometimes enthusiasm can be misguided.

There’s a story about a little boy, whose family had moved from the farm, into the city. The little boy got up one morning, so filled with excitement, that his mother (who wanted to sleep in) dressed him in his play clothes, and told him to play in the yard, and quit bothering her.

About 20 minutes later, he came running back exclaiming, “Mommy, Mommy, everybody in the neighborhood has doorbells . . . and they all work.”

That was some introduction, for his family, to their new neighbors. Excitement can be misguided.

It’s also interesting, that Jesus chose a donkey for his grand entrance into Jerusalem. As somebody has pointed out, a donkey is a creature that never got any respect, until Eddie Murphy played one in Shrek.

Jesus was riding a colt of a donkey, a symbol of humility, not a horse, which is a symbol of conquest. Jesus approached Jerusalem, in peace as a humble servant, and not a mighty warrior king. The people were so preoccupied with the notion of political and economic power, that they were blind to what was taking place, before them. God was at work, but not in a way, they could comprehend.

That’s a reminder to us, God is still at work, even when we can’t see God. In order to see God, we have to look for God.

The late Alfred Hitchcock, was one of the most influential, and extensively studied filmmakers in the history of cinema. He was known as the master of suspense. But, he had a quirk. As some of you know, if you look closely, he made cameo appearances in a number of his films. But you have to look closely, to really notice, that he’s in the picture. For example, in the “The Birds” he can be seen winding a clock. In “Dial M for Murder” he can be seen walking a dog. But you have to look.

Brian J. Waldrop, in his book titled *Ocean Breeze: Inspirational Moments with God at the Beach*, tells of flipping through the channels of his TV one morning, when he stopped to watch a painter skillfully painting a desert landscape. As the man proceeded to color the canvas in deep browns, reds, and yellows, the picture really started to look good. He felt that the painter ought to stop. The picture looked complete.

Then, as he was thinking those very words, he cringed to see the artist add a dark,

blackish color of paint, to the canvas. As Waldrop had feared, the dark blob looked awkward and out of place. But as the man continued to add texture, and other colors to the blob, it began to take shape. When the painter was finished, the part of the picture that Brian Waldrop thought was ruined looked great! It was exactly what the painting needed to make it beautiful and complete.

Waldrop writes, “As I sat there watching the program that day, I was really surprised to find myself cringing, at many of the moves, the artist made with his brush. I got to thinking how typical this is of my Christian life. Many times in my life, after much struggling and hardship, I have come to a place, where I’m comfortable. As I’m basking in the goodness of the Lord, God has chosen to institute a change, I neither expected nor wanted. During this time I cry out, ‘No, Lord, You’re ruining the picture!’ But often, as I allowed God to continue God’s work on the canvas of my life, and to my surprise, the picture would begin to look pretty good. Finally, I would thank God for the addition or subtraction to my life.”

Then he adds these profound words, “There have been times, that the change never looked good to me, and perhaps never will. During these times, I must remember, that God is still painting. The picture has not been completed yet. I must travel on in faith, knowing that when I see God face to face, my painting will be beautiful.

In the meantime, I can take comfort knowing, that every situation, though it may be ugly and bad, is paint, which the Master Craftsman, can use for good.”

God is at work, even when we’re not aware of it. The people, that first Palm Sunday, were looking for a conquering king. Jesus appreciated the peoples’ high hopes, but Jesus knew, that those hopes, were shortsighted. God had a different plan, a plan that would change the world forever. So, this brings us to the final point for today.

It’s our job, to make God visible to the world. People are not likely, to see God, unless they see God in us.

Christian author Philip Yancey in his book, *Prayer*, tells about a friend of his, an attractive young woman of mixed race named Joanna, who goes each day to visit the most violent prison in South Africa. Yancey says, “Her efforts there have shown remarkable results in calming the violence, twice prompting the BBC to produce a documentary on her.”

In trying to explain those results, Joanna said to Yancey, “Well, of course, Philip, God was already present in the prison. I just had to make God visible.”

What the people, who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem in today’s scripture didn’t realize was, that God was offering them an opportunity to join him in doing a new thing. Rather than simply smashing the oppressive government of that day, God was beginning at the bottom up, to build a new world order. He was starting with a small group of men and women, that would grow person by person through the ages, until it transcended all the governments of this world.

That ragtag army, now numbers in the millions, and it’s still growing. It’s building hospitals, universities, and schools. It’s healing the wounded, and setting free captive peoples. It’s bringing people from darkness into light. That’s, the church of Jesus Christ. That’s why we lift up our anthems of praise. That’s why we’re shouting,

“Hosanna!” today. Christ is alive and Christ is still leading the church, until that day comes, when oppression is no more, and everyone lives in dignity, peace, and freedom together, under the Lordship of Christ. God’s hope is counting on you to Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.