

March 29th, 2026, Palm Sunday

Mark 11:1-11 “Inspired to Act”

As I’ve mentioned before, the gospel of Mark doesn’t mess around when it comes to telling the story of Jesus’ life and ministry. The writer jumps right into the story from the get-go. No genealogies. No birth narrative. And get this, no Mary! No angels visiting Mary to tell her what a blessing she is for bringing the Christ child into the world like Luke or Matthew. No charming stories about Mary fussing at her son at a wedding party for not wanting to help out with a wine shortage like John. No! Mark doesn’t even *mention* Mary until chapter six when a few people in a synagogue were saying, “Hey, isn’t that Mary’s son?” That’s it! She wasn’t even in the room! If it doesn’t involve Jesus racing around Galilee healing, teaching, telling parables, or harassing religious leaders Mark doesn’t bother saying much.

As much as Mark races through Jesus’ story though, he at least slows down enough to focus on Jesus’ teaching. But even then, he leaves out the more elaborate teaching moments like the Sermon on the Mount or the Parable of the Prodigal son. But there’s a shift here in Mark 11. This is, for the most part, where Jesus’ ministry of words ends. This is where all four gospel writers merge together and focus on Jesus’ last days of ministry in Jerusalem.

This is the starting point in the gospel story that people often refer to as “the passion.” Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time. Jesus’ teaching begins to focus on the eventual destruction of the temple. The religious and governing leaders start plotting against Jesus to figure out how they can arrest him and have him executed. Jesus has a final Passover meal with his disciples, then he’s betrayed, arrested, put on trial, crucified, buried and *then* ... well, I won’t spoil it for you. You’ll have to come to church next week to find out what happens next. I will tell you that it’s pretty awesome.

We call this last Sunday before Easter “Palm Sunday” because every year, no matter what gospel we’re studying, we read about Jesus entering into the city of Jerusalem where a crowd had gathered waving palms and shouting “hosannah” which means “save us!” Side-note, “hosannah” is not a synonym for “hallelujah.” It’s an imperative statement. Not quite a plea, but *almost*. Sometimes we think that Palm Sunday is “Easter Light” – it’s the little party before the big party, and let’s face it, the church often treats it like a party. By this time, we’re tired of denying ourselves for five and a half weeks. We want to end our Lenten fast. We want chocolate or coffee or whatever we gave up! Georgeanne and I went to the Islamic Center’s Eid celebration last week with the interfaith council. That’s the end of Ramadan Fast and let me tell you those folks know how to break a fast! That was some good food.

No, Palm Sunday isn’t a celebration. It’s a political event. Ooh, I can feel the charge in the air all the way up here when I use the “p” word. “He’s not supposed to talk about politics, especially in a church that’s as diverse as ours!” To clarify let me remind you that *political* isn’t the “p” word I won’t use. The “p” word I won’t use is “partisan.” I’ll never tell you who to vote for. Now, I *will* tell you *exactly* what scripture says God requires of leaders – which is remarkably consistent – but then I let you figure it out. For better or worse, God gave us the gift of free choice. But almost every book in this anthology that we call “The Bible” is political. The root word is “polis” which means “city” or “larger community.” The definition of *political* is, “that which relates to the process, decisions, and power dynamics of a community.” So, with the exception of Philemon, Ecclesiastes, 2 John, and Jude, it’s *all* political in some way, shape, or form.

But this story is especially so. By this point in time, many Jews in that part of the world believed Jesus was the Messiah. “Messiah” literally means “one who is anointed.” In the Hebrew tradition, kings, priests, and prophets were the only ones who were anointed with oil to carry out their roles. During Israel’s exile in Babylon, the word “messiah” became more specific. They believed *the* Messiah (capital M) would be sent by

God to restore Israel to its former glory when King David was on the throne. The expectation was that the Messiah would use conventional military methods to overthrow the earthly empires that oppressed the Jews. By the time of Jesus, Rome was the third regime that governed the people of Israel, and they were tired of it. They were tired of getting kicked around for generations by the Persians, the Macedonians, and now the Romans. Their expectation was that the Messiah would lead a powerful military campaign to drive the Romans out of Judea and establish the kind of kingdom that David once ruled. But instead of charging through the main gates of Jerusalem on a horse-drawn chariot with an army of heavenly hosts behind him, Jesus came through one of the back gates on a donkey. Feel the weight of that comparison for a moment.

The story of Palm Sunday in a nutshell is that the people of Israel did not get what they wanted or expected in a King because according to Jesus the Kingdom of God was the complete opposite of the Kingdoms of the World. He'd been preaching about how the Kingdom of God works for three years. The most common phrase he used when he told parables was, "The Kingdom of God is like" He said it grows slowly and takes over like an invasive plant or like yeast in a loaf of bread. He said it will be unexpected - like finding a lost coin or an expensive pearl or a hidden treasure. And it will be extravagant and welcoming to everyone like a king's wedding banquet or a ruler who forgives massive debts, or a man who throws a party for his lost son who returned home.

So here's what the author of Mark's gospel is doing. He's not just telling us that Jesus is king. He's showing us *what kind of king* he is. And more importantly, he's showing us what kind of kingdom God's people are stepping into. Our theme for Lent this year is *Tell me Something Good*, and here's where that theme really hits home:

Mark barely describes Jesus' entrance, but he spends most of his time focusing on the crowd. Because the question isn't just, "Who is Jesus?" The question is, "How are people responding?" Because the good news

isn't something you just agree with. It's something you join. Everyone in that crowd was inspired to act. They threw down cloaks. They waved branches. They shouted, "Hosanna—save us!"

But here's the hard truth: Not all action is the same. Some people in that crowd wanted a revolution. Some people wanted relief. Some just wanted to be part of the excitement. But by the end of the week... many of those same voices would go quiet. So the question for us isn't whether we're inspired. The question is: *What* are we being inspired to do? Are we following Jesus because he meets our expectations? Or are we willing to follow him into a kingdom that looks *nothing* like the ones we're used to? Because if this Lent is all about "telling something good," then Palm Sunday reminds us that the good news isn't just something to celebrate. It's something to step into. Something to embody.

Here are some questions I want you to consider this week:

- Where in your life are you shouting "Hosanna—save us"—and what are you hoping Jesus will actually do about it?
- Are your expectations of Jesus shaped more by the kingdoms of *this* world... or by the kingdom he's been showing us all along?
- Where might you be tempted to follow Jesus when it's exciting—but fall silent when it becomes costly?
- And where do you see the good news already being *embodied*—not just talked about—in the lives of people around you?

And here's something I want you to do this week:

Pick one place—just one—where you can move from agreement to action. Maybe it's offering mercy where you'd rather hold a grudge. Maybe it's showing up for someone who's been overlooked. Maybe it's choosing generosity when it would be easier to hold back. Maybe it's refusing to return anger for anger. Whatever it is, don't overthink it. Just take one step into the kind of kingdom Jesus is actually bringing. Because the crowds waved branches for part of a day... but his disciples,

and remember that's literally what we are called, followed him all the way to the cross.