

But What Kind of Kingdom?

Mark 11:1-11

Cradock Presbyterian Church

March 24, 2013

This story is about two kinds of kingdom. One is the kind everybody standing by the road yelling and cheering wanted, a kingdom not unlike what you and I might want sometimes. The other is the kind of kingdom Jesus was really ushering in, a kingdom that lives on to this day.

Oh, they were sure of themselves, those cheering crowds. They were sure of who this Jesus was because of all those acts of *power!* This guy was healing people in absolutely unprecedented ways – just by speaking, with just a simple touch, no formulas, no tricks. He was doing things like making 5 fish into five *thousand*, walking *on top of* the water, even, some people swore, raising a guy *from the dead*. The whispers had grown to excited talk and now into full-throated, riotous celebration.

And what were they celebrating? It's obvious, as you read it in Mark's account. The word "Hosanna!" is rightly described as a petition to God to "Save now!" or "Save please!" The word in the form you hear in the Gospels is from Psalm 118, a Psalm about God giving victory in war to his people. It's really a two-word phrase. The phrase was also used in a more common way: when people petitioned the king for help. You can find that in 2 Samuel 14:4 and 2 Kings 6:26. The usage there doesn't get translated directly into the word "hosanna," but it's exactly the same two Hebrew words. And what else does the crowd shout out? "Blessed is the coming *kingdom* of our ancestor David!" Then, "Hosanna in the *highest heaven!*" – which is what Israel shouted at the coronation of a king.

It's obvious: the people all saw a powerful military and financial and everything else kingdom, about to happen; they saw glory days for themselves and their country just around the corner. That business of spreading cloaks on the road in front of the procession? That's their ancient custom for greeting a king at his coronation or upon his return from victory in battle. And the waving of leafy branches – only in John's gospel do we hear them called *palm* branches – comes from the time the people greeted the Maccabees after their successful defeat of Israel's enemies, which victory led directly to the celebration of Hanukkah. All these signs make it clear that those people in near-riot mode that day along the road into Jerusalem expected a powerful, world-dominating king.

I guess they didn't pay attention. Or maybe they were just too excited. All the clues were there, to let them know that they were wrong. This wasn't going to be that kind of king, or kingdom.

See, kings come riding in on big, majestic, white horses. They have trumpets preceding them, and ranks of soldiers in battle gear, and loads of important people, rulers and rich people alike, marching along with the new king. Jesus had a different ride. The young, unridden donkey he came in on was a symbol straight out of the prophet Zechariah, chapter 9, the key part of which you just read as your Call to Worship. You really ought to pull out your Bible when you get home and read the whole chapter. The symbol of the donkey, what it means, is that the king God sends will be one totally dependent on God – not on his own power. He will be one who has seen God deliver him when he should have been killed – and that humbled him. He will avoid

war; even more, he will “cut off the bow,” get rid of the standing armies, refuse to do war, and work instead for peace. I can tell you, the crowds thronging the streets of Jerusalem that day didn’t want to hear anything about working for peace. They wanted this man with obvious power from God to make some Roman heads roll – with as much blood and pain as possible, thank you very much. The final sign was what happened at the end of this Triumphal Procession. A king about to ascend to the throne would have stayed right there in Jerusalem. Jesus left and went back out to the suburbs, essentially. He’d be ready to do some more disappointing things in the morning.

Disappointing things – that’s what did him in, in the end. First thing the next day, he cleansed the Temple – totally disrupted the giving of sacrifices. Then in a speech he predicted that the Temple would be destroyed! People were bound to be shaking their heads. Their idea of a kingdom probably included an *expansion* of the Temple, a society with the Temple *at the center*. Jesus kept having encounters with the Pharisees and scribes and Sadducees, but now many of those people belonged to the priesthood, and the leadership, and had the power to condemn him to death. You know how it all turned out – Jesus *did* get condemned, and ended up on a cross.

And that’s exactly the throne he wanted to claim.

See, no one in their right mind would want that throne! They wouldn’t form up a procession to march in, VERY publicly, in order to take it! But that’s because our “right mind” is always about ourselves, and about what the world expects a king to be and not be. Jesus established a kingdom, all right; a kingdom to which billions of people have

been willing to give their lives. THAT'S power! – GOD'S power. No king has ever been more powerful.

On Thursday night we'll sing and pray our way through that awful evening, when the true King of the World was betrayed and abandoned by the ones he loved. On Friday we'll put our bodies out there for our Lord, as we walk his cross through our little community. And then, on Sunday, we'll come together to celebrate his coronation. These are things you don't want to miss. So – be there. Aloha! Or maybe I should say, "Hosanna." We surely are saved...