

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11 (NRSV)

“When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples<sup>2</sup> and said to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it.<sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, “Why are you doing this?” just say this, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.”’<sup>4</sup> They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it,<sup>5</sup> some of the bystanders said to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’<sup>6</sup> They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.<sup>7</sup> Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.<sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.<sup>9</sup> Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

<sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

<sup>11</sup> Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

Devotional Thoughts:

The story of Jesus’ triumphant entry is always a fascinating piece of text for me. Scholars tell me it’s been some 600 years since a Davidic kingship has sat on the throne. 600 years, then, of waiting, hoping and praying for a messiah. During that time of waiting, prophecies about the messiah were told and retold within the covenantal people. So when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt he did not need to say with words what he was intending to do. The crowd shouting “Hosanna” and “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David” was their way of acknowledging the illusion of Jesus’ action from Zechariah 9.9. What had been said in the days of old was happening here and now in the person of Jesus.

First I have to ask: why would a king, a recognized messiah, enter a town on a donkey? In our world where great leaders enter towns on glamorous chariots, expensive limos or private jets, King Jesus enters on an ass. For some, this may appear to be very un-king like, but of course Jesus’ kingdom was not from this world (Jn. 18:36). In his kingdom, it is the meek who truly inherit the earth (Math. 5:5).

I also wonder how the crowd in our text takes such a dramatic shift from shouting "Hosanna" (which means “save us”) to screaming "crucify him" in less than a week’s time? Did this shift happen suddenly, or were their shouts of “save us” all wrong from the start? The book of Isaiah says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way" (Is. 55:6). In light of this text it would appear that the Jews, after 600 years of waiting, became so enveloped with their own ideas that what was once a hopeful expectation became a vengeful demand. And if they didn’t get what *they* wanted, someone was going to have to pay.

Somehow the crowd had got God’s promises mixed up with their own selfish desires. They seemed to have attempted to bend the will of God into their own hopes and ideas. Thus it may be said that the crowd wasn’t looking for a messiah, so to say, but a throne; an earthly king to rule over all those “other” people. But Jesus as God did not see evil in the world primarily in the trans-subjective social and political situation, as if “Rome” was the chief operator of wickedness; but rather in the evil heart of the individual. It is here that I have been asking myself: Is the selfish hope of the crowd any different than mine today?

As we come closer to the day with which we remember the birth of our messiah, let us remember why he is

being birthed into our world to begin with. As Paul says in Romans, that while we were still weak, at the right time Christ came into this world to live and die for all the ungodly (5:6). That is to say, that while there were those who were trying to live life their own way, Jesus came to show us another way. It's somewhat silly how often I find myself trying to live life my own selfish way. But Jesus' call for surrender was explicit from the very moment he entered our world. For it is in the story of his birth that the baby messiah, meek as he was birthed in a manger, had men laying down their earthly possessions in order to receive the life of Jesus. A question that I have been asking myself in this advent time is, "do my shouts of 'save me' relate to what Jesus actually came to do?"

Prayer of Confession:

Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo. Set us free from a past that we cannot change; open us to a future, in which we can be changed, and grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image, denying ourselves and following you. Through Jesus Christ the light of the world. Amen