

“How to Make Holy Week Special”

Mark 11:1-11

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Christians from all over the world are gathering on the Mount of Olives about this hour. While it is morning here, the sun is falling on Jerusalem. Just before the sun sets, one person in the crowd will read the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and then the procession toward the Holy City will begin. These Jesus followers will retrace the steps he took to enter the city gates on his way to the temple. This re-enactment dates back to the fourth century.

In due time, this observance spread from Jerusalem to other parts of the world. It was first observed in Spain in the fifth century, France in the seventh century, Britain in the eighth century and Rome in the twelfth century.

In a less dramatic, but no less meaningful way, I am sure that many churches observed Palm Sunday like we did this morning by having children and adults enter the sanctuary waving palm branches and shouting hosanna to the Lord. I always look forward to this.

You know what strikes me about Mark's account of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? It is his emphasis upon the preparation that preceded the event. Mark is careful to tell us many of the details.

As Jesus and his disciples made their way from Jericho to Jerusalem, the Lord instructed two of his disciples to go into a nearby village and bring back a specific colt for him to sit on and ride into the city. It appears that Jesus had worked out an agreement ahead of time with the owner of the donkey, including the location of the colt inside the village and a password that would allow the owner to release the colt into the hands of the disciples.

Contrast this with John's account where there was no mention of any preparation. Rather, as Jesus made his way to the city gates, he saw a donkey and sat on it for the final leg of the journey. John's account gives no attention to details.

Why did Mark take a different approach? I think preparation was important to him. Evidently, he believed that significant events needed to be well thought out and planned. Details were important. Nothing should be left to chance.

You get the feeling that this event was very important to Jesus and did not need to be botched. The message of hope and peace that this grand entry into Jerusalem would convey was too important to be mishandled. There would not be another opportunity. Timing was everything and planning was crucial.

What events are important to you? I'm sure we would have some in common. Weddings, funerals, graduations, anniversaries, birthdays and even vacations are just a few. Which of these would you do without careful planning? Not one, I imagine.

What faith related events are important to you? How about Holy Week or Easter? Don't they deserve careful planning on your part? I think so.

What have you planned this week to commemorate Jesus' death and celebrate his resurrection? Will this be just another week or will you make it special? Could I suggest some things you can do that will make this week special and prepare you to honor Jesus' death and celebrate his resurrection?

Read two chapters in the gospel of John every day. Begin with chapter 12, which describes Mary anointing the feet of Jesus as her way of encouraging him for the burden he was carrying. Conclude with the story of his glorious resurrection on Easter morning and the appearances to his disciples. Express appreciation for his courage and compassion.

Go on line each day and read the Holy Week devotion for the day that you will find on our website. Let the author's thoughts guide your meditation or inspire you to write a poem, a song or a devotion of your own.

Ask God to make you aware of the people you will encounter this week that feel much like Jesus did during Holy Week: lonely, frightened, misunderstood, rejected and confused. Offer them encouragement, hope and help.

Come to the Maundy Thursday service and worship with those who keep you from feeling lonely and frightened in this warm community of faith. Bring a friend with you.

Why should we do these things? You will miss so many opportunities to encounter God and feed your spirit if you don't. Look what the disciples and other believers would have missed had Jesus not made careful plans on Palm Sunday.

"Then they brought the colt to Jesus and spread their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" " Mark 11:7-10.

You know what I have discovered? When you make plans and carry them out, it opens the door for good things to happen. Jesus' careful planning made it possible for a parade to break out and for people to affirm and embrace him. None of this would have occurred without Jesus' preparation.

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week, certainly one of the most significant of the church year. While every week is special and holds the promise of hope for a better life, this one is designed to remind us of Jesus' amazing grace. Take advantage of it.

Refresh your memory. Read the story as if it were the first time. Sit in wonder, awe and love as you retrace his steps all the way to the cross.

Imagine what it must have felt like for Jesus to be betrayed by one of his own disciples and abandoned by the others. Get in touch with how he must have felt standing helpless before Pilate and the soldiers that abused him.

Take his lifeless body off the cross and prepare it for burial. Go into hiding with the disciples. Feel their fear and wrestle with their confusion. Go to a cemetery and bury your dreams.

And then, prepare yourself for the re-birth of hope. It's coming and you don't want to miss it!