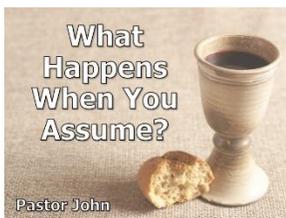


"What Happens When You Assume?"

March 25, 2018

Mark 11: 1-11

*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.*



Sometimes I think in Winner, or even in most parts of South Dakota, we are pretty detached from the violence and pain and frustration that exists in many places in our country and

certainly in our world. Yes, we may see it on television or scroll past it on our Facebook or Twitter feeds, especially when it erupts in a certain city over something that has happened there. But these news flashes that seem to come

and go with some regularity are indicative of deeper, more systemic issues in our nation and world. To illustrate, I begin today with a story about my friend McWilliam. He goes by Will and this is a picture of him preaching in one of his churches. Will is a pastor in a small community in southern New Jersey, just across the river from Philadelphia. I first met Will at Course of Study at Garrett Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. Will's mother was born in Puerto Rico and his father is an African American man. Will was raised in a suburb of Philly in a loving, two-parent home. He left his job as an upper level manager with AAA. He helped to run a call center and continues to now work part time to supplement his pastor salary. Will shared that he always did well in school as both of his parents thought getting an education was very important. He has never been in trouble with the law.



One evening a group of us walked to downtown Evanston to get some frozen custard. It was a nice break from classwork. As we walked along the street nearing Andy's Frozen Custard, a police car suddenly pulled over right by us. The policemen hopped out of the car and began chasing two teenagers. Initially I was very curious about what was happening. It was exciting to me and to most of my classmates. Apparently, the two teenagers had ridden their skateboards through the crosswalk and the police came in hot pursuit.

If you recall, two summers ago the "Black Lives Matter" campaign was going strong. There had been some shootings and riots and protests soon followed.

One of our professors was a big supporter of this movement and the topic was something that came up amongst the students. Most of us pastor in rural communities and are ourselves somewhat detached from the topic and the issue. The next night Will and Lee and I were out in Evanston again. Lee made a comment on just not getting the big deal with the Black Lives Matter campaign. It was then that I learned something I will never forget. Will asked him what he thought and felt when we saw the police chase after the two teenagers. Lee said he was curious, that he wanted to know what was going on, he even wanted to follow along to see. What Will shared next blew me away. Will said his first reaction was to run. Even though he had never been in trouble with the police, the culture and climate in which he lived had conditioned him to run. He went on to share a few stories of profiling and harassment that he had experienced as a pastor in New Jersey. It made me understand that I have no clue about the systemic injustice and violence that many in our nation and world live with every day. It turned many of my assumptions upside down.



As Jesus approached Jerusalem two thousand years ago, the people on the streets were crying out for an end to the oppression and injustice that they were experiencing at the hands of the Romans. In the crowd there was a handful of Jewish zealots, daggers hidden just under their cloaks, hoping for an excuse to shed Roman blood. Observing it all were the religious leaders, nervous about the energy in the crowd, worried about their positions of religious leadership. And then there were the Roman centurions and soldiers, ready to insure the *Pax Romana* no matter the cost. What were they all hoping for? What assumptions were made?

And then in comes Jesus, riding on a foal of a donkey. The Romans and the Jews that were there that day were doing a lot of assuming. Everyone thought they knew what Jesus' promise to bring the kingdom of heaven meant. When Jesus came and proclaimed that the kingdom of God was near, everyone assumed that they knew what He meant. Each group had their own expectations and assumptions about what this new arrangement might be.

Our triumphal entry story begins a bit oddly. The journey to Jerusalem begins with Jesus sending two of His disciples to go to the next village, where they will find a colt that had never been ridden. Jesus instructs them to take the colt. He also says that if anyone asks, "*What are you doing, untying the colt?*", to tell them the Lord needs it. They do so and the bystanders allow them to take the colt to Jesus. As the story unfolds, the disciples place their cloaks on the colt and Jesus gets on to ride into Jerusalem. Jesus rides along the road into Jerusalem and, as He does, the people lay their cloaks and palm branches on the road. Others stand along the road leading into the city and wave palm branches as they shout "Hosanna" as Jesus rode along. "Hosanna" is a hard word to translate. It is most likely a mash-up of two Hebrews terms, that when combined roughly mean, 'Save us!'

This was not the first time that 'Hosanna' had been shouted as someone entered the city. About 150 years before a Hebrew family called the Maccabees had led a revolt that drove the Romans from the city. They governed Jerusalem for a short time, but were soon defeated by the Romans. From that point on the

Romans would install puppet Hebrew kings to rule over the Jews. Herod was one of these kings who would enforce Roman rule. 150 years later, as a new group of Jews falls in along the parade route, they renew the shout 'Hosanna' because the longing to be freed from the Roman rule remained strong. No one likes to have someone else ruling over them. This was no exception.

So, there was some history already there when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday. The Jews certainly knew it. The religious authorities certainly knew it. The Romans certainly knew it too. Although it was just an impromptu parade that simply came together as it rolled along, the air was thick with tension and apprehension. This impromptu parade was at least partly a street demonstration too. We have all seen enough pictures of riots in recent times to be able to identify the tension that must have existed between the different interests present that day. The air was full of energy and buzz. It teetered delicately between impromptu parade and street demonstration and all-out riot. It does not take much to feel what it felt like that day.



And into this scene comes Jesus, riding on a colt. Can you picture Jesus just swaying back and forth as the colt walks along, smiling and taking in the scene building around Him?

Can you imagine what thoughts were going through His head? Jesus rides right into the middle of all the tension and buzz and energy. He rides right into the center of the occupying kingdom of Rome, with all of its wealth and military power. He rides ride into the ever-simmering dreams of revolution, with daggers

always at the ready. He rides right in under the watchful and jealous eye of the religious authorities, already plotting how to do away with this possible challenge to their positions. But Jesus simply rides into it. He does not take sides with the religious zealots or with the religious leaders or with the powers of Rome. No, instead Jesus confronts the expectations that they each had and He presents a new vision of what a kingdom looks like along with a new definition of power.



The Romans assumed Jesus might stir up yet another little revolution. The people who cried 'Hosanna' assumed that Jesus would affirm God's covenant with Israel, ushering in a

new earthly kingdom. But Jesus introduced another way. Jesus did bring a new kingdom, just not one that anyone expected. Jesus brought a new kingdom that was based on a covenant that simply said, "I love you no matter what". Its strength was found in its simplicity. Its wealth was found in its generosity. Its leadership was found through service. Its power was found through sacrifice.

The day could have easily turned violent. It did not. That would be next week. In a handful of days, the shouts of 'Hosanna' will turn to shouts of 'Crucify Him!' Jesus will begin a revolution. But it will be a revolution of grace and justice and forgiveness and hope and love. In this revolution, Jesus created something new. As a new thing, it was threatening to those who liked the old way. But Jesus sought to not only bring the new but also to connect it to the old. There were many who encountered Jesus and were able to assimilate the old with the new. They could see the connection from the Old Testament and the Law to Jesus

who came to fulfill and live out the Law. They could see how the prophecies and scriptures point to Jesus as the Messiah. They saw how the grace and justice and forgiveness and hope and love that Jesus lived out connected back to the God they knew from the Old Testament. They believed and allowed Jesus to transform their lives. They became followers of Jesus and lived into the covenant relationship that Jesus offered.

Jesus has always been about transformation. In the gospel of John, in the passage about the wedding at Cana, there were six stone jars. The fact that the story has six jars is an inside joke. One cannot go through the purification rituals to get clean with six jars. There had to be seven because it was the number of perfection, the number of God. Six is number of imperfection, of our fall from grace. But in this story, Jesus accepts the six and transforms them into something new. Jesus takes what is there and He transforms it into something new. This idea of transforming something old into something new is a repeated theme in Jesus' ministry. It is what happens to each new believer as the old dies away and the new comes to life. We are not one hundred percent different once we accept Christ. Christ takes who and what we are and begins to shape it into something new. But for many who encountered Jesus that day and each day since, they cannot see the possibility of the something new that Jesus can work in their lives. They assume that He is something that He is not and cannot get past that. For others, they feel that they are unworthy or cannot do enough to earn God's grace and love. They cannot accept or they do not see the revolution of grace and love and mercy that Jesus offers.

This revolution that Jesus started almost two thousand years ago has worked down through the ages. Again, it has always been the process of taking the old and making it new. It has always been about transforming each person to be more and more like Jesus. Peter and Paul and Timothy all allowed Jesus to transform them into something new in Christ and they began to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to all who would listen. The early church grew and others heard the call to follow Jesus, accepting Him as their Lord and Savior. The call was picked up by people like Martin Luther and John Wesley. They began movements that reformed the church and called people to a faith that brought salvation by grace alone. They took a belief that was hundreds of years old and brought new life to it, seeing faith as the sole means to salvation. Martin Luther and John Wesley and many others like them shared the good news of Jesus Christ. Many accepted the hope and promise and love of Jesus and they too came to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Today we are beckoned to answer that same call to allow Jesus into our hearts, to allow Him to come and dwell within and make us each into a new creation in Christ. Jesus desires to become the Lord of our lives as well. In all we say and do and think, Jesus desires to be the Lord. On that first Palm Sunday, as the crowd lined the streets and shouted "*Hosanna!*" and "*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*", they all desired that Jesus would sit on David's throne. To them, this is what Messiah meant. Today we know how far off their assumptions were. That was not the kingdom that Jesus was to establish. But, my friends, Jesus really does desire to sit on a throne. It is just not a throne in Jerusalem or Rome or any earthly city.

He desires to sit on the throne of our hearts. For Him to do so, we must surrender self to Jesus every day. Day after day. Day after day. May we enter each day offering our lives to Jesus, all for God's glory. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) What do you think are the assumptions that you have or live by that are displeasing or do not bring honor to God? How can you change these?
- 2) How could your life better reflect that Jesus is the Lord of your life? Pray for the Spirit to work in you to make you better reflect Jesus.
- 3) How could you help someone experience Jesus' revolution of grace and justice and forgiveness and hope and love? What are the first steps?