

## COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR MARCH 24, 2024

### Processional Gospel: Mark 11:1-11

- Why does Jesus ride into Jerusalem on the back of a colt “that has never been ridden”? Matthew’s version ties the scene specifically into Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Though it gets taken later as a sign of the Messiah, the key to riding on a colt is the humility it shows. Jesus comes not in greatness, but in humility. How can we follow Jesus’ example?
- We often hear this word “Hosanna!” without knowing what it means. The word is actually a phrase that means, “Help/Save (us), I pray!” It is used in the psalm that the people partially quote here: “Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! ... Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Psalm 118:25-26) It is also used as a plea to a king, as a woman cries in 2 Samuel 14:4, “Help, O king!” So, when the people cry out, “Hosanna,” as Jesus enters, are they praising God? Or are they pleading for deliverance from Roman power? If it is a plea for deliverance, that helps us understand why they turn on Jesus so soon after this entry, since the deliverance that Jesus brings is not what they expect or desire?
- Only in Mark do we have the additional line, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!” Though the people expect a physical and earthly kingdom to come, the promise we claim is that Jesus brings the spiritual kingdom of God into this world.

### Isaiah 50:4-9a

- When Jesus was alive, the “suffering servant” passages were not seen as a description of the coming Messiah. With the death (and resurrection) of Jesus, early followers started to look in Scripture for passages such as this to describe who Jesus was.
- Isaiah initially intended this passage to represent either what Israel went through in the Exile or what a prophet endures when proclaiming a word from God. When we associate these two things together, it says that Jesus goes through what we are called to go through.
- Isaiah offers two powerful images of speaking and listening. First, he describes the task of the teacher – “to sustain the weary with a word.” How can our teaching sustain the weary? How can it encourage? How can it comfort? Second, he offers an image of listening: “Morning by morning he awakens – awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.” The two images together remind us that listening is as important as speaking for the teacher. By it, he encourages us to start our day by listening.

### Psalms 31:9-16

- The psalm for the day offers something similar to Isaiah. The psalmist cries for deliverance from one’s enemies and declares trust in God in the midst of distress. Read in light of Jesus’ suffering and death, we see his suffering and death also reflected in these verses.

### Philippians 2:5-11

- Many scholars think that Paul quotes here an early Christian hymn. If so, this is one of the earliest expressions of the church’s understanding the death of Jesus. We think that Paul wrote this sometime between 54 and 59 AD. Thus, this hymn could date to the 40’s AD. As a gospel contrast, Mark was not likely written until 68-70 AD.
- In light of this hymn, what does the death of Jesus mean for how we are called to be?

**Mark 14:1 – 15:47** (refer to Bibles for highlights) – Here are significant differences in Mark's Gospel:

- While praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, only in Mark does Jesus refer to God as *Abba* Father, an Aramaic word which may be a term of endearment, like "Daddy."
- In Matthew and Mark, when Jesus is arrested and a disciple (here unnamed) cuts off the ear of the slave of the high priest, Jesus does not heal the ear. In Mark, Jesus says nothing to respond to this action.
- In Mark 14:50-52, we have the oddest of details: "All of them deserted him and fled. A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked." What does this passage mean? Here are three possibilities:
  - Some think that this was the gospel writer himself, letting us know that he was there, that he was an eyewitness to the events that occurred.
  - The gospel writer might also be using the naked man as an illustration of Amos 2:16: "And those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked on that day." In other words, the day of the Lord has come, and it causes even those who follow closely to flee away in fear.
  - Or the naked man illustrates who we are or who we become when faced with the passion of Jesus. As we enter into the suffering of Jesus, all our pretensions at greatness are stripped away.
- In Mark alone, Peter denies Jesus three times before the cock crows *twice*. In every other gospel, it is only once. (14:72)
- In Mark, Pilate does not suggest Barabbas for release. His name comes up at the request of the chief priests.
- Only in Mark do we know that Simon of Cyrene is the father of Alexander and Rufus. (15:21) This may mean that Mark's readers knew who Alexander and Rufus were, possibly as leaders in the early church. If so, it would be a way for the writer to say, "You may not know Simon, but you do know his sons. You know Alexander and Rufus? Simon is their father!" Two other details may confirm this:
  - Paul refers to a Rufus at the end of Romans: "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother – a mother to me also" (Romans 16:13)?
  - In Acts 11, we hear about the following incident: "But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:20-21) Who were these men that came from Cyprus and Cyrene? How had they heard about Jesus? Could these men have heard about Jesus from Simon? Could these men have included Simon?
  - In the end, these are only speculations, but it is powerful to consider how one small act might have led later to the leadership and witness in the early church.
- Mark alone gives the time of the crucifixion (15:25 – "the third hour" = 9 am).
- In Mark, Jesus' last words on the cross are also the last words that Jesus will say in this gospel: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34) **What does it mean that the last words of Jesus in Mark is the cry of despair? What might it mean for when and where we find Jesus?**
- In Mark, it is because of these words and how he breathed his last that the centurion declares: "Truly this man was God's Son!" (15:39) – the only one to declare this in the gospel. **What does it mean that only an outsider recognizes what has happened? Where do we need the voices of those outside us to show us the way of faith?**
- Mark names the women who are looking on from a distance. (15:40).
- Only in Mark is Pilate surprised that Jesus has died so quickly (15:44-45).