

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Palm Sunday

Sermon Series: Following Where Jesus Leads

(studies in apprenticeships to Jesus from the Gospel of Mark)

King Jesus...Angry

(Mark 11:1-18)

Study #8

Introduction: A bad Friday morning...

Friday morning was tough. Yes. Two days ago.

First, there was an early morning computer glitch. I had copied a file from the church computer and took it home to work on. I do this all the time.

Sadly, this time I copied the wrong version of the file. So, when I cranked up my laptop at home early on Friday morning, I didn't have the file I needed. It was maddening.

Later (same morning), I walked down the street to find that something maddening had happened in the neighborhood (no details; sorry).

And a few minutes after that, at about 6:30, I drove down the street to my favorite greasy spoon for some *heuvos a la mexicanas*, only to find that the Taqueria Aguascalientes was closed. I got madder.

Like I said, Friday morning was tough as I had to suffer through a personal error, misbehavior on the part of others, and disappointment over lost tacos.

When I sat down with Kathy for breakfast, I did a quick survey of my emotional dashboard and admitted that I was angry.

Anger is a real and present danger for most of us. After all, there are so many things to get angry about.

Besides personal mistakes and missed tacos, we might rage at Covid-19, the weather, our family, the economy, Facebook - and sooooo much more.

Can you recall the last time you erupted with an outburst of anger? Do you remember what prompted that outburst? How did you express your anger?

Anger is a frequent temptation for many of us. I wonder - and you might, as well - if my anger is ever justified. Could I ever be legitimately angry?

Well, "Yes." There is a justifiable anger.

Of course, there is also unjustified anger - and much of mine is that. But it is possible to be "good *and* angry".

That combination would result in anger that fulfills the purpose for which God gave anger in the first place. It would lead to something good and loving.

Today, we see Jesus, angry. That may or may not surprise you, but you should know that what we'll see today isn't the only place in the Gospels where we see Him angry.

This one is different, though. Here, Jesus' anger turns violent, and violent anger breaks the box in which lots of us have placed Him.

In the minds of many people, Jesus is...nice. Mild-mannered.

What we will see in Mark's Gospel destroys the idea of a mild-mannered Jesus. He may be lots and lots of things. But He is not mild.

I'm not implying that in what we'll see today Jesus was reckless or out of control. No, He was completely in control of Himself during His outburst of anger.

But by giving us a record of His rage, Mark allows us to see what Jesus cared about most passionately and what He wants us to be most passionate about, too.

First, though, we'll see something else.

Last journey to Jerusalem

When we catch up to Jesus, He and His disciples are just outside the city of Jerusalem.

They've traveled the long, uphill road from Jericho and have come to the two small suburbs of Bethany and Bethphage.

After spending the night in the home of good friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus, Jesus set in motion His plan for a grand entrance into the capitol city by giving instructions to two of His disciples.

The King Presents Himself to His People (Mark 11:1-11)

King Jesus Chose His Steed (vv. 1-7)

Instructions (vv. 1-2)

[11:2]...“Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here.”

Jesus wants His entrance into Jerusalem to be “just so.” He is the Jewish Messiah entering His city. And He's thinking about how the Jewish prophets envisioned the Messiah's entrance.

Here's how Zechariah pictured it:

***[9:9] Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;***

***He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

In the ancient world, when a king wanted to let everyone know that he had everything under control in his kingdom, he would ride a “steed” that would be useless in a battle, something like ***“a colt, the foal of a donkey.”***

Jesus' choice of a mount said to the crowds who were streaming into Jerusalem, *“Nothing to worry about. Relax. The kingdom is just where it should be and just where I want it.”*

But donkey's colts cost money and Jesus and His followers didn't have cash to buy a colt. So, how will they secure this colt?

Simple. They will take it. The king can do that.

Jesus told them how to handle any resistance that might arise.

Preparations (v. 3)

[3] “If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ you say, ‘The Lord has need of it’; and immediately he will send it back here.”

Jesus is the king who is controlling events in his kingdom. He's controlling the details of the donkey's location and the response of the donkey's owners when His disciples take it.

Mission: Accomplished (vv. 4-7)

So, the disciples went into town, just as Jesus had told them to do. The colt's owners questioned them, just as Jesus had told them he might.

And when the disciples replied as Jesus had told them to, the owners let them take the colt, just like Jesus said they would!

[7] They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it.

Seated on the donkey's colt and surrounded by His disciples, King Jesus began riding down the slopes of the Mount of Olives, toward Jerusalem.

The King Approaches (vv. 8-10)

Treated like royalty (v. 8)

At that time of year (spring, just like today) all the roads leading to Jerusalem were crowded with Jewish pilgrims making their way to the capitol city to celebrate Passover.¹

Many of those coming into the city would have taken the same road Jesus had. So, there were thousands of people in front of and behind Him, traveling because it was Passover, not because of Jesus.

But their response to Jesus when they recognized Him was remarkable.

They had heard the stories of His miracles and His teaching. They had heard about how He had bested the Pharisees in some great "one-on-ones." They had heard that He was a Savior (after all, His name, "Yeshua" means "savior" in Hebrew).

This multitude saw Jesus riding on a donkey the last mile to Jerusalem and figured, "*This is it! He's come to set up the Kingdom!*"

And they began to treat Jesus the way people in a monarchy treat their king.

[8] And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields.

See, you don't want the king to get His feet dirty. You don't even want the king's colt to get dirty hooves.

¹ Passover was and is a yearly Jewish festival that commemorates the Jews' deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Passover celebrated the redemption of the Jewish first-born males of those families which had sprinkled lamb's blood on the doorpost when the death angel came through Egypt.

Branches from palm trees² that lined the roads helped make a carpet for King Jesus as the crowds cut off those branches and piled them in the road, along with their cloaks.

They treated Him like a king, and they spoke to Him as people speak to a king.

King Jesus, the Messiah (vv. 9-10)

[9] Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: "Hosanna!"

"Hosanna" is sometimes used today as a near synonym for "Hallelujah!" But "Hosanna" doesn't mean "Praise the Lord!"

It means, "*Save us NOW!*" It was a cry of desperation, shouted by people who were realizing that HERE was the Man who held the key to their salvation.

Of course, the salvation they were thinking of was certainly salvation from Rome, a political deliverance. And Jesus wasn't about that. He had come to deliver from the much greater bondage of sin.

But they saw their desperate plight. They recognized that they could not save themselves. And they begged King Jesus for deliverance.

Then they cried out,
"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"³

That is a quote from Psalm 118, a psalm that was read every year at Passover *and* whenever the Jewish king led the people to worship in the Temple.

² According to John 12:13.

³ This line was one that was very popular in the days of Jesus. People quoted it often in reference to the coming of the Messiah, the One around whom all their hopes and dreams revolved.

It was the perfect Psalm for the people to sing as Jesus made His way to Jerusalem, because on this day the crowds saw in Jesus the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams.

And THAT is the Triumphal Entry. THAT is Palm Sunday.

On another occasion, right after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand,⁴ a huge crowd had been trying to force His hand to lay claim to the crown.

On that day He would have nothing of it.

Instead, He gave a special message for that occasion that so offended the crowd (we refer to that talk as His “The Bread of Life” sermon) that on that day, the number of followers dropped from thousands to exactly twelve.

But here, on this Palm Sunday, He received the praise of the crowds. Here, He welcomed it.⁵ He drank it up.

Granted, it was a short-lived popularity. It lasted the whole hour it would have taken for Jesus to ride on the back of that colt the mile from the Mount of Olives to the Golden Gate of the temple.

Yet in that brief time span Jesus presented Himself, finally and irrefutably, as the KING He truly was.

Responding to King Jesus today...

From the very beginning of His life, some people had understood that Jesus was a king.

Herod the Great, the Roman-installed king who reigned over Israel at the time of Jesus’ birth, was convinced of Jesus’ royalty.

He was so convinced that he ordered the slaughter of all the babies around Bethlehem to do away with his competition.⁶

The Gospel of John records that Nathaniel, one of Jesus’ earliest disciples, said to Jesus, “**Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.**”⁷

But for most of His life Jesus was a king *incognito*, under the radar. Mark’s Gospel, especially, portrays Him throughout as a servant, not as a king.⁸

Palm Sunday is the one shining *exception* to the general rule of His life’s commitment to lastness and lowliness.

This was the day when the veil was ripped away, and everyone recognized King Jesus.

We Americans don’t really know how to relate to a king. We operate under a representative democracy, not a monarchy. We instinctively consider each other - including our leaders - equals. Everybody is on the same level.

And that’s so true. We are all equal. With each other.

However, a person living under a monarchy has a head start in knowing how to relate to King Jesus, because he knows how to relate to Queen Elizabeth or Salman of Saudi Arabia - or Caesar.

We don’t. So, here’s the quick and dirty low-down on how to respond to a king: You *submit* to him. You *obey* him.

Responding rightly to King Jesus means that we give Him our submission and our worship.

⁶ Matthew 2.

⁷ John 1:49 - This was after Jesus identified him as an Israelite in whom there was no guile.

⁸ This, the Servant aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry, is the special emphasis of Mark’s record.

⁴ John, chapter 6.

⁵ On this day, as He said in another place, if the crowds had been silent, the rocks would have cried out. (Luke 19)

“Jesus is Lord” has been the cry of the church for two thousand years. That is our confession this morning. Right now.

He is the KING and the King is calling you, His child, to submit to His lordship today.

He has saved you from your sin and from eternal death because of your faith in Him. You have received the priceless gift of eternal life at no cost because Jesus paid it all. All it took from you was trust.

So now, having been so wonderfully saved, in every arena of your life, obey. Submit.

Jesus’ Triumphal Entry calls us to a heart posture with respect to Jesus: submission.

The event that follows gives us direction as to how to channel that heart posture in a very practical, people-loving way.⁹

The King Clears the Way for ALL People (vv. 15-18)

Entering the Holy City (v. 15a)

[15a] Then they came to Jerusalem...¹⁰

The events we have just seen took place on the first day of the week, which was for the Jews, Sunday.

That evening Jesus and His disciples went back to Bethany to stay the night and returned to Jerusalem on Monday.

On Monday, they were inside a hectic Jerusalem. There were enormous crowds as they made their way to the temple.

⁹ On the next day, before Jesus makes it into Jerusalem, Mark tells us about a run-in Jesus had with a fruitless fig tree. It’s a fascinating little story which we won’t explore today. Briefly, that fig tree symbolized the fruitlessness of Israel over the years when she should have been directing people to God. As Jesus cursed the fig tree for lack of fruit, so Israel will soon be set aside for the same reason.

¹⁰ Mark tells us that this event occurred on the day *after* the Triumphal Entry. Matthew and Luke, who also record this event, don’t commit to when it occurred.

In the Old Testament we read of a temple built by King Solomon. This is not THAT temple. That temple was destroyed by the Babylonian army when Jerusalem was sacked by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

Nearly a century later, a man named Zerubbabel led refugees who had returned from exile in the rebuilding of the temple. THAT temple is not this temple through which Jesus walked, either.

This is the temple built by King Herod in place of Zerubbabel’s temple. Herod’s temple was much less ornate and beautiful than Solomon’s, but much more massive.¹¹

And, while we’re talking about the temple, a word about how the temple was physically arranged. This is important.¹²

We should think of the Jewish Temple as a building arranged in a series of concentric circles radiating outward.

At the center was the Holy of Holies, the place where the presence of God dwelt.¹³

Outward from that was the Holy Place. Beyond the Holy Place was the Court of the Priests, then the Court of Israel, and the Court of the Women.

Then, on the outer periphery, was the largest area in the whole complex: the Court of the Gentiles (i.e. - non-Jews).

Once inside the temple precincts, Jesus saw something that made His blood boil.

¹¹ Herod’s Temple and all Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans.

¹² The temple was built on the same model as the tabernacle which God told the Jews to make in the wilderness. Interestingly enough, God never commanded them to make a temple. He seemed quite content with a tent.

¹³ Notably, the presence of God never dwelt in Herod’s Temple as it had been in Solomon’s - except for those times when Jesus walked through it.

The King Enforces the Law (vv. 15b-16)

The need for marketplace activity

What He saw going on would have been IN ANY OTHER PLACE perfectly legitimate marketplace activities, then and now. (Well, not so much now...)

Back then, Jews had to pay a temple tax. But they had to use Jewish currency. So, a Roman denarius had to be exchanged for a Hebrew shekel.¹⁴

And, because the Mosaic Law required sacrifices, animals had to be bought and sold.

The Mount of Olive Market

For these transactions there was a market in place on the Mount of Olives, nowhere near the temple and outside the city walls.¹⁵

At this market you could exchange your money and you could purchase animals for sacrifice, you could buy clothes and food and video games.¹⁶

Temple protocol

But buying and selling was prohibited in the temple. Under no condition was merchandise even to be carried through the temple. No marketplace activity allowed.

And there was no need for buying and selling or money exchange in the temple because of the market on the Mount of Olives.

That was how things had operated for a long time. Then, a few years prior to Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, things changed.

A Temple Market?

The High Priest, Caiaphas, made a calculated decision to open a new market to compete for sales with the Mount of Olives market. In the temple complex.

By the time Jesus arrived on the day after His triumphal entry (Palm Sunday) this new market was famous for its flea-market like atmosphere.¹⁷

And we know from historical records that inequities abounded in the temple market.

Animals were sold at exorbitant prices¹⁸ and moneychangers charged outlandish rates for the exchange of foreign currency for "temple coins."

So, there were problems with a market being located in the temple at all AND there were problems with the corrupt operations going on there.

When Jesus saw what was going on, He became angry. Very angry.

Jesus unleashed (v. 15b-16)

[15b]...And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; [16] and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple.

This act of enraged violence was thoroughly premeditated. It was not an impulsive outburst. He made a plan and He carried it out.

¹⁷ It was referred to as "Caiaphas' bazaar".

¹⁸ I've read accounts of Jewish pilgrims who came to Jerusalem to worship. They had money to buy an animal for sacrifice, would pay their money and watch as the animal was taken behind a curtain. After they left, the same animal would be brought back out and sold to others throughout the day for the same purpose.

¹⁴ The currency was Tyrian, similar to the old Hebrew shekel.

¹⁵ So Lane, France, in their commentaries.

¹⁶ The Mount of Olive markets were put in place far away from the Temple so as to keep marketplace activities separate from the Temple and its functions.

Among the many ways in which this act was remarkable, the most remarkable aspect may be that nobody tried to stop Him.¹⁹ He was acting out of sheer moral authority.

Now, this is not the only time we see Jesus angry in the Gospels.

- He was angry when He saw the hard-heartedness of leaders who objected to Him healing on the Sabbath.
- He got angry at rulers who tithed garden herbs while violating mercy and justice.
- He got angry at those who were more concerned with external behavior than with purity of heart.

But here He got violent. The buying and the selling that was going on in the temple was the only behavior that prompted violence.²⁰

Why? Thankfully, He took the time to explain why He reacted so strongly.

Rationale for the Cleansing (v. 17)

[17] And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN."

¹⁹ I like the way author John White put it: "Jesus would have been sweating and panting with exertion, and yet there would also be a calm purposefulness in His eyes that people could not face. Sheep, oxen, pigeons, and people were forced out through the temple gates...Unsuspecting merchants arriving with more animals would be startled to find their way barred...a whip gripped in the menacing fist of the Man with the unflinching gaze. It is false to assume that there was something supernatural about the awe He created. He was God, but He called down no legion of angels to help Him, nor is there any evidence that a mystical terror paralyzed the merchants. His control of the crowds was by a moral force, forged by His total lack of ambivalence and the moneychangers' uneasy consciences."

²⁰ Jesus' temple cleansing is also mentioned in John, chapter 2. I believe that John records the first and our passage today records the second time He cleansed the temple, once at the beginning of His ministry; once, near the conclusion.

If it seems strange to you that Caiaphas opened up the temple market in the first place, I understand. It's weird - but to him it made sense.

In fact, I think that if you had accused Caiaphas of wrongdoing for setting up the temple market, I think he might have responded, "Hey, what's the big deal. It's not really the temple. This is just the Court of the Gentiles."²¹

That's right. The High Priest set up the market in the one place in the whole complex where a non-Jew could hear about, learn about and worship the one true God.

Imagine a Gentile who has traveled a long distance to Jerusalem to learn about Israel's God. He comes to the temple and finds his way blocked by moneychangers and sheep sales.

He and others like him had come so far, had gone to such trouble to make it to the temple - and now the people of God were making it harder than it needed to be to actually draw near.

It was this - people getting in the way of others who were far from God coming to God - that provoked Jesus to violent anger.

Of course, Jesus objected to the unscrupulous pricing structures and to the other injustices.

But mostly, He objected to the whole enterprise of buying, selling, and transporting merchandise, and trafficking through THE COURT OF THE GENTILES!²²

It wasn't because the buying and selling in the temple offended God's holiness that got Jesus "good and mad". He got angry because the markets got in the way of lost people finding their way to God.

²¹ Note "*for all the nations*", identifying the location as the Court of the Gentiles.

²² A couple of centuries earlier, a Gentile ruler by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes had defiled the temple (164 BC) with the sacrifice of a pig on the altar in the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus sees what the Jews of His own day were doing as similarly a perversion of the purpose of the temple.

My heresy for the week is that Jesus wasn't that concerned about Herod's temple. It was a big building. He was concerned for the living, breathing "images and likenesses of God" *in* the building that stirred His passions and prompted His violence.

Seeing people (the religious rulers) who should have known better keep people from knowing about God moved Him to make a mess out of their market.

But, by restoring space for people in the Court of the Gentiles, those who were far from God could come to know Him.

It was a dream come true for these Gentiles. It was for Jesus, too, whose life mission was to make a way for all people everywhere to draw near to God.

As we wrap up looking at this incident, we learn what were the reactions of those who saw what Jesus did.

Aftermath (v. 18)

The response of the rulers (v. 18a)

[18a] The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him...

They moved quickly. Four days after what we have just seen, Jesus will be crucified on a Roman cross.

And the onlookers to the temple cleansing?

The response of the crowds (v. 18b)

[18b]... the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

They're astonished. Probably favorably, but only temporarily. By the end of the week, many of these who are astonished will be crying out, "***Crucify Him!***"

Conclusion:

To conclude this morning, I want to fast-forward about twenty-five years to a completely different scene.

This scene will show that Jesus' followers learned the lesson of the temple cleansing and it will preview to what we here at Northwest will be considering together, after Easter.

The location of this scene is Jerusalem, same as in Mark 11.

By this time, the Jesus movement has spread through all of Judea and even beyond the Jewish world. Gentiles were starting to follow Jesus, coming to faith in Christ, joining The Way.

The presence of these non-Jews made life difficult, messy, for some Jesus-following Jews.

Some of the Jewish Jesus followers wanted to require these Gentile Jesus followers to keep the Mosaic Law if they want to be accepted fully by God and if they want to be accepted into the Jesus movement.

It was a huge moment for the whole movement.

So, church leaders from all over came together to wrestle with the question, "*What do we do with these Gentiles who are starting to follow Jesus?*"

After lots of debate, the leader of the Jerusalem church (James, Jesus' half brother), recognizing that God was working in these Gentiles just as He had in the Jews, said,

[Acts 15:19] "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles."

Or, *“Let’s not make it any harder than necessary”* or *“Let’s not put any barriers up”*.²³

I wonder where they got that idea...?

They got it from Jesus, who overturned the money-changers’ tables in the Court of the Gentiles that were making it harder for people to come to God than it needed to be.

If our hearts beat with the heart of our Savior, we will be careful to remove any barriers that keep those who are far away from drawing near.

That is something we will be giving a lot of attention to after we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus next Sunday. That - removing barriers - is the assignment we have each received from God and the assignment our church has, too.

Jesus showed us the way. It’s up to us to follow.

²³ New Living Translation - And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. New International Version - It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. English Standard Version - Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God. The Message - So here is my decision: We’re not going to unnecessarily burden non-Jewish people who turn to the Master. Phillips - I am firmly of the opinion that we should not put any additional obstacles before any Gentiles who are turning towards God. Living - And so my judgment is that we should not insist that the Gentiles who turn to God must obey our Jewish laws.