

Moving Forward Mark 11:1-11, Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29 - 4-09-06

I was talking to one of you the other day and I asked if this person could guess just how many times I have preached on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. There was no response, which I thought was very gracious. I know the answer—twenty five times. And, yet, the picture I have in my mind's eye of this story never seems old or tired. It might not be the true picture of what actually happened on that day we remember as Palm Sunday, but it is my picture. I am sure we each have our own picture stored in our individual minds.

I see the narrow, cobblestone streets, see the little colt and the man riding it. I see palm branches on the road in front of him and waving overhead and I see people welcoming him into the sunlit city. All of them probably had different thoughts about who he was. Some of them knew nothing of him and did not much care who this strange looking man was riding into their city as if he was some sort of king. Some hoped he would be the political messiah who was coming to overthrow Roman rule, others hoped he was the Son of God coming to help them discover a new way of life that would be better for all those who chose to learn from him. I am sure there were not many who believed he was riding toward his death a few days hence. Since everyone loves a parade, people turned out to see this fellow who had caused a stir in and around Jerusalem. They had heard of miraculous healings and wise words and a patient, gentle, understanding nature.

This also was the time of Passover, a time when the city would have been packed to overflowing with the Jews who had come to the Temple to keep that important holiday. An historian of that ancient time, Josephus, estimated the number of Passover pilgrims at about 2,700,200 people. This estimate was arrived at from Temple records that indicated how many lambs had been sacrificed for the feast.

Jesus came into a crowded city full of intense religious feelings. William Barclay in his book The Mind of Jesus writes that "Jesus' decision to come into Jerusalem in such a way.... was deliberate and "had been arranged far ahead." It was an act of courage.

He rode on a colt, the mount kings rode when they came in peace. Had he not been coming in peace the choice would have been a horse. So he was bold enough to ride into the city as a king, but not one that sought political power. Of course, this seeming arrogance was misunderstood as he was so often and got him into lots of trouble.

During the week that was to follow, Jesus showed that he was not always patient and gentle if we think about the story told us of driving the moneychangers from the temple. Along with anger Jesus also showed signs of being fearful about what it was that lay ahead, but, in spite of it all he continued to move onward in life. I think of those moments in the Garden of Gethsemane when he asked if this cup could not be taken from him. He also said, "thy will not mine be done."

Moving forward into life and through it with courage is something we all must do. If we refuse to continue moving forward, we stop living. I believe we all know this. But there are times when we become paralyzed and stuck in one place for a while before something nudges us to move forward again. On occasion I think it would be very nice to find my way to some deserted island and just plant myself there allowing the rest of the world to go by. I am not sure just how long I would last somewhere out there without some sort of computer and access to the Internet. When I begin to feel this way I know I need to step aside for a while, regroup my strength and then get back to the so called real world.

Sometimes things seem to be too much for us to face. We have our own smaller Gardens of Gethsemane in which we kneel down and ask God to please spare us from what it is we must endure. I believe those who never know these times are truly fortunate or are possibly truly unaware of the life that flows through them and around them. Life is no picnic. It is beautiful and wonderful but it can be tough and terribly grinding, draining us of all our reserves. It is at those low moments we must hope for the strength and courage Jesus revealed to us during the last few days of his life. We all have it in us to go on. We do, even when we believe otherwise. We all

have the ability to look for the light that shines upon us and pulls us out of the depths of deep despair. We all have the knowledge that our God, the Ground of our Being is always present to lift us up and urge us forward. Our walk is not always as that of Christ's to a sure and certain death. Although there will be a time when it is. To live life and celebrate it with courage and strength is something we, as believers in the way of Christ, are called to do.

During this last week of Lent before we come to the glory of Easter, we need to pause for a moment or two or even more, and realize how our faith sustains us and keeps us strong whether we are moving along in a parade, or on our knees in a garden or struggling with our own smaller crucifixions. We need to understand that the courage and strength revealed to us by Jesus are characteristics we all possess as his followers. Characteristics that will bear us through the days and nights of life in good stead and that will wrap us together in a web of life worth living.
Amen