

Palm Sunday Mark 1:1-11 St. David's Episcopal (Elizabeth Felicetti)

The 1979 prayer book changed the way Palm Sunday is observed in Episcopal churches, changing Palm Sunday to Palm *and Passion* Sunday. The entire passion is read because those prayer book editors were concerned that not enough of you would come to services on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, also known as the Triduum, when we will hear these stories again. So, we all have to listen to the whole thing today. But I am not going to try to preach about the passion whole thing this morning, even though we just had a dramatic reading of the passion according to Mark. I want you all to think back to the liturgy of the palms at the beginning of the service, because that's what we'll focus on in this sermon. I also really hope you will come to our Maundy Thursday service on Thursday night and our Good Friday service at noon to hear about the other Gospel readings in more depth. I will also keep today's sermon brief since we had an additional and extra-long Gospel.

I believe that the Gospel of Mark requires more of us as readers and listeners than the other three Gospels. We have to-or get to—make more use of our imaginations. For example, Mark's gospel omits mention of palm branches specifically, instead calling them “leafy branches.” We as readers fill that in based on what we know from the other gospels about this story. The rest of it is mostly the same, with him riding a colt into Jerusalem in triumph. Some of the same people who will soon be shouting for his crucifixion here spread their cloaks and treat him like a king.

Next Sunday is Easter, when we will celebrate and explore the resurrection, the defining event of our Christian faith. Today, let's lean into Mark and Jesus as fully human. How would he have felt, for example, riding a donkey into Jerusalem, with people spreading cloaks and branches before him as if he were a king? He was a king, of course, but not any kind of king that the world had ever seen.

How do you imagine him riding that colt? I have typically thought of him as looking down or straight ahead, but I don't know why I think that. Mark certainly doesn't provide any clues, which gives me more room to fill in. Perhaps, even though Jesus knew what was coming for him in Jerusalem and had tried to tell the disciples many times: perhaps he was swept away by the hosannas and the cheering crowds. Perhaps he was smiling and waving. Perhaps he basked in the love that day. I hope so, knowing what was coming next.

While we do have a couple of “immediatlys” in this passage, which seems to be Mark's favorite word, I find this story a little slower paced than many of his other stories. The immediatlys come from Jesus himself as he directs his disciples to get the colt and bring it back, but the procession seems slow.

Then we come to the temple, which Jesus will soon cleanse in Mark's version of events. But that day, it was late, and we just hear that Jesus “looked around at everything” before leaving.

Looked around at everything. Isn't that interesting, coming from Mark, who usually writes all action and few details? Jesus looked around at everything. Soon he would drive out buyers and sellers and overturn tables, but after riding in on a colt, he just looked around at everything.

I invite you to mimic Jesus by slowly "looking around" at everything over this Holy Week, so that when we arrive at Easter Sunday, we are steeped in stories about that first Eucharist and about the cross and the tomb. We can be tempted to rush from party to party, from the festive red of Palm Sunday—which is supposed to be blood red, by the way—to the brilliant white of Easter. If you aren't able to attend Maundy Thursday, Good Friday or Holy Saturday, I hope you will consider taking your bulletin home and slowly ruminates over Mark's version of what happened after this triumphal entry. If we stop and look around, following in Jesus' footsteps, then we can have the most meaningful Easter of our lives.