

Sermon Notes: The Last Week

Lent 2024, Week #1

Introduction

This is the first week of our Lenten sermon series based on the book *The Last Week* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. This series will take us day by day through Jesus' last week in Jerusalem. As we open, we explore the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and compare this to the likely historical entry that Pontius Pilate would have made through the opposite side of the city. Where Jesus enters on a donkey, Pilate likely enters surrounded by military might. These differences are essential to understanding the divine power of the Christ, and his essential teachings during this final week.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LshX2God-wk&start=00&end=180>

A clip from the 2004 film *Mean Girls* where a character shows humility in the face of popularity.

Video Discussion Questions

1. This scene shows two high school students being voted “king” and “queen” of a popular school dance. How do the two students respond? Are these responses the same or different? In what way? Perhaps you have been voted or selected for some highly-desired role. If so, how did you respond? If not, how would you like to respond in such a situation?
2. Cady (the young girl elected “queen”) and the audience both seem surprised at her selection. Have you ever been surprised to be selected for something? Was this a good surprise? How did it feel to be selected? Did this boost your confidence? Did this give you a sense of power? What do you think these mean?
3. Cady notes that the tiara placed on her head is highly desired. People in our world sometimes desire tangible things (homes, money, jobs, friends, cars, etc.), and sometimes intangible things (power, influence, etc.). How do people today express want and need for highly desired things? How do *you* express want and need for highly desired things?
4. What does Cady do with the tiara (and the social value of the tiara) when it's given to her? Do you agree with her response? Do you think this response is applicable to other circumstances when someone receives highly desirable things? Why or why not? If you think this response is applicable, what do you think something like this would look like in other circumstances?

Mark 11:1-11 (CEB)

¹When Jesus and his followers approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives. Jesus gave two disciples a task, ²saying to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter it, you will find tied up

there a colt that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘Its master needs it, and he will send it back right away.’”

⁴They went and found a colt tied to a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. ⁵Some people standing around said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶They told them just what Jesus said, and they left them alone. ⁷They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes upon it, and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread out their clothes on the road while others spread branches cut from the fields. ⁹Those in front of him and those following were shouting, “*Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*” ¹⁰*Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!*” ¹¹Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. After he looked around at everything, because it was already late in the evening, he returned to Bethany with the Twelve.

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. Today’s passage is rich in connections to the Old Testament. In Mark 11:1-2, as Jesus and his disciples are approaching Jerusalem, Jesus instructs a couple of them to go ahead and find a colt that has never been ridden and bring it back to him. Look back at the prophetic Old Testament book of [Zechariah 9:9](#). How does this passage relate to what is going on in Mark 11?
2. Mark 11:8 indicates many people threw their cloaks on the road for Jesus (riding on the colt) to pass over. Check out [2 Kings 9:13](#). According to this passage, throwing cloaks and palm branches on the road is a traditional way to welcome a new king. Do you think the Palm Sunday crowd was welcoming Jesus as a king? If so, what do you imagine were their expectations for their new king?
3. According to Mark 11:9-10, those following Jesus into Jerusalem are shouting, “Hosanna” – a Hebrew word that means “save us.” Why might the people have been shouting “save us” to Jesus? Do you think they wanted to be saved from their sins or saved from the Roman oppression they were living under? Something else?
4. If you are familiar with the story of Jesus, you know that while “Holy Week” starts with the crowd in Jerusalem welcoming Jesus as a king, it ends with Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. Do you think the people who shouted “Hosanna” to Jesus early in the week were the same people who were shouting, “Crucify him,” later in the week? If so, what caused them to change their feelings about Jesus? Or do you think these crowds might have been made up of different people? Why might different groups of people have had such different reactions to him? How has your understanding of and relationship with Jesus changed over time?
5. How does our church help people grow in their understanding of and relationship to Jesus? Are there new approaches we might take to help people grow in their understanding of and relationship with Jesus?

Add'l (Optional) Questions for Consideration

1. What symbols are mentioned in these passages that are significant to Palm Sunday? What symbols does our church use when we celebrate Palm Sunday? Anything in addition to palm branches?
2. Why do you think the crowd was so enthusiastic in welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem? Do you think the crowd would have known [Psalm 118](#) (*especially v26*) and linked it to Jesus? Or do you think that happened later?

3. How do we try to show our enthusiasm about following Jesus? What makes that easy and what makes that difficult?
4. Imagine you were a witness to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, with the same kind of faith you have today. What would you do if you were there? If something like this happened today, would people still be waving palm branches? Would everyone have their phones out to livestream or record? Can you think of any modern-day equivalents for this kind of celebration, where someone arrives and a whole crowd of people has a lot of expectations on that arriving person to deliver something great or new or some kind of change?

Weekly Action

Prayerfully examine what strength and power look like in the world today, and specifically in your own life. Make a list on a piece of paper or a digital device of these examples from your own life. Think honestly about where you might carry these as a kind of "badge of honor." Consider the incredible strength and power that Jesus has as the Messiah and Christ and Son of God and how he continually humbled himself—even to the point of death on a cross. During your time of prayer, ask God how you might follow Christ's example of humility. Take time to listen to God's response. Then return to your list and note how you might embody Christ alongside each of the items listed. Conclude your prayer with thanks to God.

Prayer

God of the foolish cross, tottering down the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey, You are not the savior we expect. Your power doesn't look like the power we want our God to demonstrate. Your wisdom makes no sense to us. We are happy to join the crowd, waving branches, But not so sure we want to follow you into the temple courts into the upper room into the Garden of Gethsemane to the foot of the cross. Forgive our false assumptions. Clarify our clouded vision. Let us relax into the foolishness of your love, your grace. Hosanna, hosanna. Save us, we beseech you. Hosanna!