

A Defining Entrance
Mark 11:1-11

Sermon by Matthew Richard
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Thank you band and ensemble. I especially appreciate the way our band has grown in their ability to transition us from a time of worship through song, to a time of worship through the spoken Word. We utilize music to make this transition in our service. If you go to see a big-named musical artist in concert, however, you might find that they utilize a number of methods in “making an entrance” to start off their show. Those of you who are Elvis fans might remember that one of the entrances he became famous for involved the playing of the theme from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Anyone know the title of that without googling? *Strauss - Also Sprach Zarathustra*. At any rate, this long, grand instrumental song would play while Elvis fans madly chanted his name. Sometimes his name would be scrolling across a screen, lights would be flashing, smoke might be billowing up from the stage. Meanwhile, Elvis would be backstage in a long line with his band, stage crew, sound technicians, and who knows who else – each person with their arms linking up with the person’s shoulders in front of them.

And after the crowd had waited what for seemed like an eternity and the music drew to a close, they would all make their grand entrance together – to which the crowd became even more wild in response. By today’s standards, that might be a tamer entrance, but back in the day, it was quite a big deal. Justin and Angie Stephens are concert buffs so I asked Justin what the coolest concert entrance he’d ever seen involved. He told me that one of his favorite recent ones was going to see the band *Poison*. He described it like this: *The lights went down and a cartoon of the band heading to a gig played on a giant screen. The cartoon ended with a back shot of the band heading into a brightly lit stage that faded to their logo and then BAM! Drums, lights, guitar riffs, and into the songs. Tons of energy from the crowd, it was a blast!* He then added this little tidbit just in case I was unaware - *Most Poison lyrics are definitely not Church material but they made a great entrance.* Thanks for the heads up! It’s always good to give a disclaimer regarding what you approve of when talking to the pastor – just to make sure he doesn’t think you are a heathen.

I suppose concert entrances have come a long way, but the purpose of them remains the same – to make some kind of statement about the artist or band and their music or reputation. I remember when Garth Brooks broke out in the 90’s as being a country singer that acted like a rock star. As the show’s entire lighting rig lifted from the stage and into the rafters, Brooks rose from the innards of a white baby grand piano via a hydraulic lift as smoke filled the stage and his seven-piece band joined him. He’s since become famous for incorporating pyro-techniques, aerial stunts, and of course, smashing his acoustic guitar on stage into hundreds of tiny pieces to the roar of thousands of fans. He’s been accused by some as being too over-the-top for a country artist. For not being a “real” country artist. For selling out to showmanship and commercialism. But he fact

remains, his entrances and his stunts have certainly made a statement about the kind of artist he was wanting to be, and the music he tried to make. And to be sure, that statement has resonated with many.

As we begin walking with Jesus through the last week of his life in the book of Mark, we begin with an entrance that Jesus specifically chose to make a statement. While this “triumphal entry,” as it has come to be called, might not seem very radical or explicit, we have to remember that in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has not been quite as forthcoming about his identity as he is in some of the familiar passages in John we associate with proclaiming this. In fact, quite the opposite, Jesus has employed what has come to be called “the Messianic Secret” throughout Mark, instructing many people that he healed and performed miracles in front of NOT to tell anyone about his identity. So when Jesus essentially acts out the prophecy of Zechariah 9, where the humble and righteous Messianic King comes to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, he is proclaiming that something new and radical is about to happen. **(Read Mark 11:1-11)** Of course, that new and radical thing – the coming and reign of Israel’s Messiah – would not come about through the way that anyone (including Jesus’ own disciples) expected.

So Jesus is essentially defining himself through the Triumphal Entry. He defined himself
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I. In the way that he entered

When Jesus picks the Mount of Olives to stop and request for his disciples to obtain a colt (donkey) for him to make his entrance upon, he’s setting the stage for his reenactment of Zechariah’s prophecy, as the Mount of Olives is the place Zechariah imagines the Lord standing on judgement day. We puzzle at his simple instructions for them to go to this predetermined place and take another person’s property, with a simple explanation for anyone who asks: **“The Lord needs it” (v.3)**. This strikes us as strange, but in Jesus’ day, people in authority (kings, civil leaders, etc) had the right of borrowing an animal that was needed for immediate service, with the understanding that it would be returned. Perhaps the thing that really should strike us as peculiar is not Jesus’ instructions, but the people’s response to what he instructed his disciples to say. Without even questioning who Jesus was or what right he had to do this, Jesus’ disciples were left alone to do what he had instructed them to do. In other words, they recognized Jesus’ right to act in this way. This whole scene is simply pointing to Jesus’ identity as Messiah – and you get the impression from Mark – that there really was no other alternative. It’s inherent to who Jesus is.

One of the unique things about being one of the only people in a small church office where people come in and out – is that over the course of time – you begin to memorize the way people enter the building. When Duane wasn’t working for the Retreat Center and he visited us at least once a week – I always knew it was him when the door of his Scout (a huge box on wheels) slammed shut outside my office window. It’s the only vehicle that made that sound. I can tell when Terry is coming by due to the way his Traverse sounds when he locks it and the fact that he has keys to let himself in the door I

keep locked. I can tell when it's Alice because she usually gives clearing of her throat as soon as the door opens. Crystal just lets me know to avoid surprise – "I'm in the building!" she'll announce as she walks from the fellowship hall entrance that she usually uses. The only person I sometimes miss, especially now that he lives behind the church, is EJ. I don't know if it's because he uses the entrance by the youth room and is just really quiet, or if he is secretly planning to sneak up on me one day and do something mean, but he's gotten really good at just appearing suddenly out of thin air in my doorway – and for a split second I jump out of my skin. But even this way of entering, in my mind, has come to be associated with him in the same I associate the other ways with other people.

By the time the disciples arrive with the colt for Jesus, we see that, almost instantly, people fall in line in affirming Jesus' entrance as the messianic scene he is reenacting from Zechariah. Without being instructed, the disciples throw their cloaks on it. The normal approach to Jerusalem by pilgrims was on foot. By compliantly expecting Jesus to ride an animal (something he is not portrayed as doing anywhere else in the Gospels), they recognize there is something inherent about this symbolic entrance that is connected to Jesus' identity. And while they didn't understand all its implications, it was the disciples' job to prepare for this entrance.

Likewise, we have the job of preparing others for Jesus' entrance into their lives. Most of the people you and I know think they have a pretty good handle on Jesus – but when you look close, there are small giveaways that this may not be the case. Maybe you have a friend that knows all the right religious language – they ask for prayer when they are sick, might even attend church occasionally, and they more-or-less want to come across as moral, patriotic citizens. You've just described an average person in Gatesville. But when you look closer, it becomes evident that the Jesus this person knows or worships isn't the one that defines him as their Lord AND Savior. But rather, a version of him that they hope will just make things a little better. And maybe the greatest thing you can do for these folks is to be there for them when (not if) going to church, praying to Jesus, or reading the Bible doesn't make things better. That is when they will need a Savior. That is when they'll be open to turning to Jesus as Lord.

That's how Jesus defined himself in the way that he entered. He also defined himself in . . .

II. In the response he received.

While Jesus planned out his enactment of the prophetic scene from Zechariah, the crowd's response is spontaneous. The spreading of their cloaks and branches on the road recognized Jesus as one with authority and rank. Less than 150 years before Jesus was born, a Jewish war hero by the name of Simon Maccabeus received a similar entrance into Jerusalem, with hopes that he would be their Savior against the Romans. With hopes that he would make things better and improve the lives of God's people. No doubt, people had a similar hope for Jesus. Which begs the questions – why DID Jesus receive this response? Why did he allow the people to offer such a grand gesture toward him, knowing not only that it was wrong-headed, but that they would be sorely disappointed

when they discovered the kind of Savior he really came to be? Jesus was certainly no stranger to correcting people's understandings and preaching difficult sermons. But Jesus chose to receive the peoples' response.

Have you ever had a child try to do something for you that turned out being less than ideal? Maybe a pre-schooler once gave you a handful of "flowers," that were actually weeds. Chances are, you received them with joy. Maybe you even put them in water and displayed them on the kitchen table. Or have you ever had a child present a drawing that included you as part of their family, and you couldn't help but notice that the stick-figure that was supposed to be you was bo-legged and hunchbacked, and had huge lips and eyes, but a barely visible nose? Of course, that didn't stop you from displaying their art on the refrigerator and telling them how much you appreciated it. Or perhaps a child once attempted to make you breakfast in bed as a birthday or anniversary present. Under normal circumstances, you would have never touched the blackened toast with huge butter globs, or the Lucky Charms filled to the very brim of the bowl with milk, or the scorched scrambled eggs. But in this situation, you gladly received this gesture and even ate a bite or two of the food set before you. Not because any of these things are accurate representations of ideal flowers, art, or breakfast. But because a young child was doing the very best they could to express devotion to you. So you receive it – with the understanding that you will help them grow in their understanding of these things as they age appropriately.

The truth is, apart from Jesus' impending death, burial, and resurrection, this crowd just couldn't fully understand the whole picture of how Jesus was defining himself in this moment. But their response (**vv. 9-10**) to his arrival in Jerusalem at least indicates that they were trying. "*Hosanna*" means "save now," but had become simply an exclamation of praise. "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*" is a customary greeting or blessing pronounced on all pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. But there is no denying that "*blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David*" demonstrates an expectation that Jesus would in some way be involved in bringing a new salvation to them. And even though that expectation misses out on the full significance of Jesus' arrival, Jesus receives their response, knowing that full understanding of who he is and what he is doing will only be possible later.

I don't think it's inaccurate to say that Jesus receives our responses in a similar manner. Some of you may have responded to Christ for the first time because you didn't want to go to hell. Jesus receives that. Some of you may have responded to Christ initially because you saw how broken your own earthly family is, and you wanted to be a part of something that involved real love and acceptance. Jesus receives that. Some of you might have responded to Jesus because you want your kids to do well and head down a positive path – Jesus receives that. But at the same time, he is always inviting us into a deeper understanding of what it means to have him as our Savior. Most of us can easily say what it is that Jesus has saved us *from*. But what has Jesus saved you *to*? What is it that you GET to do because of what Jesus did FOR you?

Finally, Jesus defined himself through the triumphal entry . . .

III. In the place that he went.

From time to time, I'll look back at my old high school senior yearbook and marvel at where my old friends and I have ended up since graduating from Orangefield Highschool. In our yearbook, seniors got to include a quote next to their picture, and let me tell you, we were an insightful group. So insightful, in fact, that one of my close friends' quote was: *"peace out."* Another was *"it's been real, it's been fun, but it ain't been real fun."* I tried to take the high road, and rather than quoting a cliché or popular phrase, quoted Paul partially in *Philippians 3:13-14*: *"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal."* This was just my self-righteous, religious sounding way of saying "peace out," like my friend. And when I look back over these quotes and the immaturity they reflect, I'm amazed at where each one of us have ended up today. One friend became the head of purchasing for Beaumont ISD, the other a finance agent for Northwestern Mutual. And I went on to learn about the dangers of proof-texting and gained a deeper appreciation for the Bible.

When Jesus "graduated" from carpentry school, I'm not sure Mary would have ever envisioned this day, or the place to which it would lead him. Not because they'd never been to Jerusalem - Jesus would have made this trip many times with his family as an act of religious devotion on foot, without people lining the sides of the street and chanting, without the donkey, and without the motive that would lead him into conflict with religious authorities. But this time, Jesus wasn't going to perform a sacrifice, he was going to be a sacrifice. This time, he wasn't going to express devotion, but correct devotion. Mark tells us in v. 11 that upon arriving, Jesus went to the **"temple courts,"** which refers to the temple area, not the building itself. At this point, the crowd that had created such a raucous had dispersed, and only Jesus' disciples remained with him. Mark continues in v. 11 by noting that Jesus **"looked around at everything."** Not as a tourist, or even as one that came as a pilgrim.

But as one that came to set all things right. What did Jesus see when he looked around? He saw people selling things for personal profit to worshippers. Mark mentions doves. John mentions sheep and oxen. These animals were sold for sacrifices and were appealing due to convenience. It would have been much easier for a pilgrim to Jerusalem to purchase one of these than to bring their own and then have to have it inspected to ensure it was kosher. He saw tables set up to exchange the Roman money pilgrims brought to Jerusalem to pay the Temple tax into Tyrian currency (the closest thing to the Hebrew shekel), which was the only form acceptable. The problem is NOT the fact that these transactions and exchanges took place, but that they took place within the Temple courts. While Jesus received the fanfare upon his entrance, the place he goes shows us he isn't a Savior concerned with popularity, but with making things right. And the next day his concern would result in action.

It's interesting that the place Jesus goes in defining himself as Savior wouldn't have been a new place, but a very familiar one. As disciples that follow in the tradition of that same group that stuck with him beyond the fanfare and into the Temple courts, our challenge may not be to go somewhere new either. It might simply be to look around that the places God has us. Chances are, things are not exactly like they should be in your family, your

job, your town, even our church. And Christians are sometimes guilty of turning a blind eye because we think “well, that’s just the way it is for now, life won’t be perfect until we get to Heaven.” Can you imagine if Jesus would have taken this perspective? It wouldn’t be long before the Temple would become a thing of the past – both historically and in the life of the Church. But he doesn’t turn a blind eye. Some of us have turned a blind eye to things in our lives for so long that fixing it isn’t even a possibility. Before we think about that, we need to look around. To really look around, and let our Savior that saw corruption in the Temple help us see pain in our families, selfless opportunities at work, and ways to serve in our church and in our community – to make them more like God would have them to be.

In the past month or so, Michelle and I have had both of our vehicles worked on for various things. I initially took my car in due to an oil leak that I’d known about for a while, but kept getting progressively worse. Jack (from Poco Automotive) calls and tells me that I have more than an oil leak, that I also have a hydraulic engine mount leaking. A similar thing happened to Michelle’s van, which had also had an oil leak that I’d ignored for a while. Jack calls and says that the oil leak will need to be fixed, but that I also have power steering fluid leaking from a hose. Do I say – well, I didn’t ask you to look at those extra things. Just fix the oil leak and move on? Not if I want my car to run properly. I say thanks for taking a thorough look at ALL the issues my car has.

We have a Savior that, even as he entered the city of his death, didn’t overlook the issues that kept God’s people from living the life he intended. And if we’ve allowed him admittance into our hearts, he gives us a Spirit that enables us to look honestly, thoroughly, and intently at all that keeps us from being rightly connected to him. And the Good News is – he’s already paid the price to fix it. Would you let him?