

# What's in your worship?

## Sermon 4-14-2019

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#### Mark 11:1-10

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

<sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

#### Message:

Listen as I share, in my own words, these three encounters of Jesus. Listen carefully for what each encounter shares with the other. The first one, a man ran to Jesus and asked, “What must I do to get eternal life? I know all the commandments. I’ve upheld them all my life.” Jesus answers, “Yes. You have done all these things well, but there is one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and give the proceeds to the poor.” The man couldn’t believe what he just heard. It was his greatest fear. He went away distraught and saddened because he knew that he couldn’t do this. Therefore, he will not inherit eternal life. Jesus looked at his disciples and said, “It will be hard for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Many who are first in this life will be last in heaven. Many who are last in this life, will be first in heaven.” Second encounter—James and John said to Jesus, “In your glory, grant us to sit at your right and and your left hand.” Jesus replied, “I can’t grant you this because it’s not mine to grant. It is those among you who can grant such things.” When the other

disciples heard this, they became angry at James and John. Jesus followed-up by saying, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For I did not come to be served, but to serve and give my life for all.” The last encounter I want to share with you—Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree in the distance. When he arrived, there was no figs on the tree because it wasn’t the season for its fruit. He said to the tree “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” Later, they passed by the tree again and the tree had withered to its roots. Peter remembered Jesus’ words to the fig tree. Peter said, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” Jesus replied, “Have faith in God. If you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Now that you’ve heard these three encounters, what do they have in common? If you didn’t notice, these three encounters surround our passage today and inform our understanding and interpretation of our passage. What do they have in common? What is the Spirit saying to us today? I’ll reveal that in a little bit. First, let’s take a look at our passage.

“When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”” So here are some background pieces to this passage that you may not understand at face value. To ride a colt that has never been ridden is an action of a conqueror. When a nation conquered a major city or nation it was common for them to claim an unriden, top-of-the-line, horse without asking permission. This was the right of the conqueror. Here, Jesus is playing a little mockery. He’s riding in on a colt, other versions of this story it’s a donkey, but He’s not riding in on a horse. He’s triumphantly entering Jerusalem just as a conqueror or King would do. What distinguishes Jesus here is his promise to bring the colt back. A King or conqueror would not be so kind. Jesus just wants to borrow the colt. And so the scene unfolds, “<sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.” “<sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.” The people are

joining in on the scene by providing cloaks and leafy branches to lay at Jesus' feet as he enters Jerusalem. Gestures of welcoming a King. One of the things you have to understand is that this is the season of Passover where as many as 3 million Jewish pilgrims come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. As Jesus journeyed towards Jerusalem for Passover, and likewise, many of the pilgrims, they heard stories from Jesus, Jesus answered their questions and he performed miracles in front of them. So many of the pilgrims are on this adventure with Jesus journeying with him across the land to Jerusalem. They've seen and heard Him. They've been amazed by Him and captivated by Him. You also have to understand that many come to believe that He is the liberator that they've been waiting for. They're celebrating a previous liberation in Passover and now some believe He is the liberator that has been prophesied and they've been waiting for. Jesus represents their hope for a renewed society for reclaiming Jerusalem and Israel. So not only do they respond with cloaks and branchy leaves, but with one voice, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

So...I'm a fan of the HBO show, Game of Thrones. Many of you may not care about this, but I'm going to geek out and tell you about it anyways. Game of Thrones is full of incredible story telling and twists. It's not one of those shows where you can half-pay-attention and still get the gist of the plot. If you blink, you'll miss an important piece. The show begins it's final season tonight. As I was writing and preparing this sermon, this one scene in the show came to mind. Tyrion is a dwarf, played by Peter Dinklage. Because of his small stature he's had to develop his intellect, which makes him quick witted in the show. At this point in the show, Tyrion is the right hand of a ruler, Daenerys Targaryen. He's her diplomatic advisor. Tyrion isn't the type to have faith or believe in anything beyond him, spiritually speaking. He relies mostly on his intellect. But there is this vulnerable scene between Tyrion and Daenerys where he says something like, "I have never believed in God or gods, but I...believe in you. It's embarrassing, quite honestly." In this scene in Game of Thrones, in the encounters I shared earlier and in this triumphant entry of Jesus, it raises a fundamental question for all of us, "What do you worship?" We all worship something, whether we admit to it or not. Or to mimic the Capital One commercial, "What's in your worship?" We may all claim that we worship Jesus, but do we really?

What the encounters that I shared earlier reveal is what each one worships. Jesus seems to have a knack for exposing what others worship. In the story of the rich man, it's obvious. The man can't give up his wealth to follow after Jesus. He goes away grieving. He truly worships wealth over Jesus. In the request of James and John they seek popularity and power. They want to be at the right and left hand of Jesus. They want to be associated with Jesus and have the prestige, but

they don't actually deserve such honor, first based on making the request in the first place and the secondly, on the desire to be known rather than to serve. What they worship, in actuality, isn't Jesus, it's prestige and fame. Jesus snuffs this out by letting others say if they deserve the honor of being his right and left. Obviously, they don't. The encounter with the fig tree is a little less obvious and more tricky. Smashed in between Jesus' action of cursing the fig tree and explaining the withered fig tree is when Jesus cleanses the temple flipping over tables and calling the money changers, "...a den of robbers." The temple has become a place where it is a production machine. You don't have an animal to sacrifice for your sins? No problem, we have one for you at a premium price. Can't afford a goat for sacrifice? We have pigeons for you at a premium price. And of course the proceeds of these sales go towards the temple and it's maintenance AND keeping the priests comfortable. Have you ever been in an organization where you, the individual, didn't matter, but what you produced mattered more? Or maybe your purchase or contract with a company you just feel like another number that doesn't matter as long as the company gets your sale? For the temple, their production and keeping the hamster wheel going became more important than connecting the people to God and facilitating their relationship with God. Similarly, if we measure the fig trees worth just based on its production, we would do as Jesus did, curse the tree. What the disciples may worship is the productivity of the tree or the lack thereof and therefore judge its worth based on its productivity.

In our passage, it appears as if the people are worshipping Jesus. They're doing the right thing. But are they really worshipping Jesus? As I mentioned earlier they thought he might be the one to restore their society, Jerusalem and Israel to a former version of themselves. So are they really worshipping Jesus or are they worshipping what he may represent? They think he resembles a reclaiming, nationalistically, Israel. They call Him an "ancestor of David." They believe He is the liberator. They worship what He has done for them, but do they really worship Him? Do they want a relationship WITH Him? WITH God? When I think back to our passage in Luke 8 on the Parable of the Sower that we studied in February, I'm reminded as I look at this triumphant entry, of the seed, the word of God, that fell on rocky soil. Jesus explains this portion of the parable as, "...when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away." In our passage at the triumphant entry they express great joy and awe proclaiming, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Of those who proclaim these words at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, I wonder how many of them will later shout along with the crowd something very different, "Release Barabbas! Release

Barabbas! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Barabbas, a criminal and murderer. How many of these proclaiming “Hosanna” are just going along with the crowd, but aren’t actually devoted to Jesus? They support Jesus now, when it’s easy, but will they support Jesus when no one else does? Or will they just go along with the crowd?

This raises a difficult question for us in our time, it’s easy for us to worship Jesus when everyone else is doing it. But more and more Christianity is falling out of favor in America. Will you merely be a supporter of Jesus shouting “Hosanna!” when it’s easy? Or will you also believe and worship Jesus when no one else around you is proclaiming His name? Maybe even when others are condemning Him to death? Contrasting this scene with the Pilate and Barabbas scene confronts us with who or what we worship. If Jesus were to confront you today about what you worship or what’s in your worship, what would it be? Maybe it’s your spouse, children or family. Maybe its food. Maybe it’s riches. Maybe it’s fame. Maybe it’s power. We all worship something. We all fall into the sin-trap of worshipping something other than Jesus. The rich man didn’t think he had anything to confess until Jesus cut straight to the heart in his love for wealth. I pray that you are convicted of these things today and confess them to the Lord for forgiveness so that you may proclaim with me genuinely today the joy of the Lord. That you’re not just a fleeting fan or soil that is made of rock. That we can proclaim together, “Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” And here is the greatest news of all, it’s not about what you do or don’t do, but about what He is about to do on the cross for us. It’s about His faithfulness to us even when our faithfulness to him is fleeting. May we worship Hosanna today and proclaim His name! Amen.