

Election Year
Lesson: Mark 11:1-10

It's an election year. It just goes on and on, and we have only just begun. The real vote is half a year away, and we have thousands of repeats of negative commercials to watch. We will give billions of dollars in a futile attempt to keep the government from misusing some of *our* money. There is an irony in there somewhere. We wind up with a President who is not going to be able to get much done *again* because the people who do not want to give up anything will keep him from doing, ...well, much of anything.

In the 1960's when I was more idealistic and less cynical, I saw a political cartoon that I have never forgotten. It showed a man who had obviously been standing at the bar too long, with another drink in his hand, staring up at the television showing one of those commercials. He says, "I think they ought to try it four years without a President."

Here's the deeper problem, if you ask me (and why would you?). I don't see any candidate who truly will say what the country needs if it is what we don't want to hear. I'm not really blaming them. Like the old comic strip character Pogo said for all posterity, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." We have reached the place where we have convinced ourselves that we have suffered terribly, and we have already given too much, and all the problems are someone else's fault, and it is time that we ...well, we are out of time, and they are out of time, and we want someone who will solve this thing right now! Kick the rascals out that we voted for last time to kick the rascals out! No one seems to be able to solve our mess in 3 years. What we really need is a, ...a, ...a Messiah!

Jesus rides into Jerusalem sure in his call that he is God's Messiah and a savior to his people in ways that God understands and they can never fully know. He must have had a flood of thoughts going through his mind. People shouting "hosanna" with their enthusiasm in the moment, with their religious hopes that a true prophet would reform the temple and end the infighting, with their political dreams that someone would come to force the Romans out and restore Israel to glory, with their shallow and self-centered desires that he would give them the better life they wanted.

He was not the first candidate for Messiah. For longer than our country has been around, there had been a parade of pretenders. But this Jesus from Nazareth is the first to perform miracles and to speak for God with authority. He hasn't caved in to pressure from the Pharisees or the push for popularity. Just the opposite. He stands up to anyone who wants to use him or use God for their own purposes. They can feel the tension in the air, the confrontation in the next moment. This is his "time" for the showdown, and surely God will deliver their hopes and dreams after so long a wait, after so long a season of hardship and loss of influence in the world and questions about the future that no one can answer. They want a return to the glory days, and they are willing to the song one more time, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord."

They are like us, or we are like them - looking for a Savior to save us.

But we are short on time this week, so here is the question? Do we want salvation enough to accept *his* idea of being saved, or do we want to be saved on our terms? Isn't that the question that haunts Holy Week from the first one that was definitely not that holy until this very day when we followers sit in a safe place we call a sanctuary, and pray for more safety.

*This is the Sunday when we have to decide if being a Christian is about all the joy and peace that he gives to us; ...or about staying faithful to what God is trying to do to make the world look like it is supposed to in God's eyes. Are we with him, or do we want him alongside us. Do we expect Jesus to stop in the middle of his Holy Procession to solve our trouble or give us an encouraging word in our difficult road of life? Or, are we willing to step off the curb and get past our songs of praise, and follow him in *his* road this week?*

Before the weekend, most everyone is going to bail on Jesus. And Jesus is not going to bail on God. He has reached the place where what he decided in the beginning has come down to how he will live in the end, and when he looks back over the three hard years and the road he has walked, he sees no reason at all not to trust God and stay faithful.

Do you remember how it started for Jesus? With a baptism and a blessing and a voice that said, "Listen to him." Jesus went to the mountain wilderness to decide what he had to say and do in this calling he had been given. And in spite of his motives and his discipline, his prayer and his fasting, Evil shows up to offer him some alternative strategic plans to accomplish his mission. It could be easier than faithfulness and sacrifice. He could just turn stones to bread and end world hunger. People would follow the food anywhere. He could jump off the roof of the temple. God would send angels to cushion the fall, and everyone would vote for him. "Look out over the landscape from the heights of your retreat," whispers the voice. "You don't just have to be Messiah for a spiritual Israel; you could be President of the whole world!" Just let me be your Chief of Staff.

Jesus knew it was a test. Jesus knew the choice was to give them what they wanted, or show them what they needed. Jesus knew that they couldn't choose between the two until they had seen the other choice. So he lived the choice and became the servant.

He modeled a life that did not want what they thought they needed, and they were attracted to his difference. He gave instead of got until he had only giving, and they envied his peace. He saw others that everyone else overlooked and he called them by name, and they heard him tell them to serve "the least of these." If he with so little could do so much, they knew they could make life different for the ones everyone ignored. He said that real life is found in deeper places of hard decisions for goodness, in priorities of need over desires for fun, in comforting the grieving, and being kind to those who don't deserve it. He said that that making peace is different from keeping the peace, and he said that purity of heart just wants to see God will done. He showed them *the* truly human life that was more than their less-than-human living, and he announced

good news that God would give them the same life as his where love rules and they live blessed, and heaven has come to earth.

I'll be honest with you. I don't blame them for bailing. You need more than a grain of mustard seed worth the faith to jump into the unknown of love like that. You need some answers, some assurances, ...at least some clue that a guy riding into town on a donkey can conquer all the king's horses and all the king's men. You need a miracle that can't be explained away. You need a sign that the mystery beyond is better than the reality now. All they needed was for Jesus to end world hunger, or show them some angels, or show all his power so the nations of the world would bow down to him. He could have their vote, but they needed more than promises. So, the hopes of Sunday with songs and palms in the street faded by Thursday and stayed home on Friday.

Jesus, faced with the same tests he had faced from the beginning, and saw no reason to bail on God now. Being faithful had been its own reward, in a way. And besides, maybe God did have something better in mind that even he could imagine in all his single-minded selflessness.

When it comes down to life or death, faithfulness or failing, choosing to run from trouble for doing good can mean that Evil is the one who has sent the other angels to cushion your fall, to give you Artisan bread, and to offer you a house on the hill with a beautiful view, if not the kingdoms of this world.

If you are thinking that the next toy or the next deal or the next election is going to turn things around and happy days will come again? Then you have more reason to look for a different Messiah than they did on the streets of Jerusalem that day.

This is the Sunday when we have to decide if being a Christian is about all the joy and peace that he gives to us; ...or about staying faithful to what God is trying to do to make the world look like it is supposed to in God's eyes. We have an advantage they did not have the first Sunday on the streets in Jerusalem. We know what happens the next Sunday. We have gotten the miracle that can't be explained away, and we have received the sign that the new life on the other side of choosing is better than all the lives that choose another definition of "the good life." We have the mystery of an empty tomb on the other side of a cross, and we have twenty centuries of evidence that the band of faithful who step into the road of following the risen Lord have done more for God than all the kingdoms of this world that have risen and will surely fall.

This Sunday, start a different week in your life. Step out into the familiar road of your living, but go the direction that the King of King and Lord of Lords is walking. Say "yes" to the chance to serve him, even when it might not be what you want. Give yourself to someone everyone overlooks. Open your heart to a new song, and teach someone to sing it. Come Thursday, remember body and blood broken for you, and make Friday Good in prayer and offering yourself without worrying about he might lead. Give yourself to *his* love that never lets go, *his* peace that passes all understand, *his* faith that never fails, and *his* hope that never disappoints.

What more blessing could you need? "Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord." Blessed are all who walk his road this week.