

Whose Agenda?

Mark 11:1-11 (March 28, 2021)

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When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and 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. ³If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Historical Context

There were two processions into Jerusalem during the time of Passover. One--the Roman army--came from the west. The other--those with Jesus--came from the east. The Roman army was coming to maintain order during Passover, a time when the population of Jerusalem would swell from around 50,000 to well over 200,000. Moreover, Passover was a celebration of liberation from Pharaoh in Egypt, and Rome was uneasy about its anti-imperial content and associations.

Theme: Whose Agenda?

Perhaps the most notable thing about Mark's version of this story is how anti-climactic it is. All the excitement of the parade, the crowds chanting, the road strewn with coats and branches - it all leads up to, well, nothing. Jesus looks around, and then turns around and returns to Bethany.

Whatever the disciples expected to happen, and whatever the crowds expected, just didn't happen. Their expectations and Jesus' agenda are worlds apart.

Their agenda is a coup d'état. Jesus' agenda is to scope the place out for a teach-in. Their agenda is a revolution that will sweep away one empire and replace it with a new empire. Jesus' agenda is a revolution that will replace empires altogether with a humanity in which everyone is included. Their agenda is to co-opt God to legitimate their vision of utopia. Jesus' agenda is to realize the divine image that lives in every person.

So, at the end of the day, after all the excitement, nothing happens. The expectations are utterly unmet. This is indeed the beginning of the end, where the unmet false expectations turn the crowd's adulation to disappointment, and finally to bloodthirsty anger.