

Sermon Notes – March 28, 2021

(Mark 11:1-11)

How many of you have ever been through a hurricane? Any of you that have lived along the coast know that for six months you live in hurricane season - from June to November. When I was living in Florida, I got tired of always having to pack-up, seal up the windows and doors, go stay with somebody, or go out of state because a hurricane was coming. In the summer and fall of 2004, I went through three hurricanes in Stuart, Florida - Ivan, Frances, and Charles. In one of those, the storm winds were 155 miles per hour! You thought your house was going to be blown in on you. Well, you also know that there is “an eye of the storm.” “An eye of the storm” is the hole in the center of the hurricane, and during that time, it’s clear; the sky is blue; it’s calm; and you can’t even hear the wind or birds or anything at all. It’s as calm as can be and you think it’s safe to get out, but within two miles, there are whirling winds that can be blowing as fast as 225 miles per hour, and you can die quickly. The only way you can get through the “eye of the storm” is to go through the wind at some point. You are told to “Stay in. It’s not a good time to come out,” but you are tempted to do it because it is so calm and beautiful.

I wonder if Palm Sunday was like the calm reprieve in the storm for Jesus? He was getting ready to begin Holy Week and he’s in the “eye of the storm.” Palm Sunday was that calm, peaceful time with all the storm brewing around him. The “storm” consisted of anger, misunderstanding, protests, revolt, vengeance and anger toward the Romans, and anger towards Jesus because he wasn’t the conquering king that they expected. The storm was building momentum. So, today (Palm Sunday) was the calm in the middle of the storm.

Now, in some of the gospels, it says that Jesus went to the Temple and cleansed it after he got there. Mark’s gospel says that Jesus got to the Temple, looked at it, got back on the donkey, went back to Bethany and Bethpage, and the cleansing didn’t happen until the next day. But, in Matthew, Luke, and John’s gospels, Jesus cleansed the Temple on that day. Momentum was beginning to build and all the cheering, the “Hallelujahs,” the “Hosannas,” the “Blessed is he who comes in the name

of the Lord” were going to stop during Holy Week. What made it stop between Sunday to Friday morning and they were ready to crucify him? I want to talk just a little bit about that this morning. Why did the cheering of the masses stop? Why did they want to crucify Jesus so much? I want you to think of three or four reasons:

Number one was that Jesus began near the end of his life to talk more about commitment, discipleship, and following him. Following him meant a life of sacrifice, service, humility, love, and grace. Jesus had been doing miracles in the early-point in his life – healing the blind, the lame, the lepers, and raising Lazarus from the dead. He had done all kinds of things – he had preached grace and mercy. Remember when the woman who was caught in adultery by the Pharisees was brought to Jesus? They said, “We caught her in the very act,” and their laws said that she must be stoned to death. Jesus said, “Ye who are without sin cast the first stone.” Jesus extended compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and rescued her from those who wanted to kill her. Jesus preached compassion, mercy, and servanthood. You remember that there was a rich, young ruler who came to Jesus, and asked “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Keep the commandments.” He said, “I’ve done that.” Jesus said, “But one thing you lack, go sell all you have, give to the poor, and then come follow me.” You see, the Jews believed if you were rich, God had blessed you and if you were poor, God was punishing you. Jesus is sharing a different kind of message. “Go share what you have – rich or poor.” Servanthood is the key to greatness in the kingdom of God. The disciples argued about it. “Who’s going to be the greatest?” James and John said, “Lord, can we sit on your right and on your left in the kingdom?” And Jesus said, “You guys are thinking wrong. You want a worldly kingdom with power, prestige, wealth, and stuff – but greatness in the kingdom of God is about service to others. Those who want to be great will serve the least and the lowest.”

I want to share a story with you about a Pastor friend who lives in a big city – the inner city. They do a ministry for the homeless called a “Foot Clinic.” On Tuesday nights, the homeless can come into their gymnasium and people in their church and their community come in and wash the feet of the homeless; it’s based on Jesus washing the feet of the disciples.

So, they have a “foot clinic” and they wash the feet of the homeless people. They have a podiatrist that comes in and cuts their toenails, they give them a pair of clean socks, and they feed them. The Pastor tells a story about one young man in his church, who every Tuesday night goes to wash the feet of a homeless man. He said, “I can see him every Tuesday when he comes in. He’s got on his white dress shirt, his red tie, his red suspenders, his dress pants, and his suit coat. He’s an Advertising Executive on the rise. He’s about 35-years old. But, every Tuesday night, he shows up. He takes his suit coat off, rolls up his sleeves, sits down on a stool in front of a homeless man, takes a basin of water and a towel, and washes the feet of a homeless man. Afterwards, he takes the towel, dries his feet, applies ointment to the blisters and sores on his feet, and gives him a pair of clean white socks. When the homeless man puts those white socks on, every once in a while, a tear will stream down his face -- almost like a signal that it’s the first time he’s seen a touch of kindness and compassion in quite some time. This man, named Robert, who is the Advertising Executive, comes every Tuesday night. After a few times, the Pastor asked him, ‘Why do you do this every Tuesday night?’” He was kind of embarrassed and didn’t want to say, but he eventually replied, “Preacher, I guess that I know I’m going to see Jesus here more than most of the places that I travel and visit for business,” and then he walked off. The Preacher said that Robert showed up every Tuesday night. The Preacher began to watch him closely, and went to say - “What I noticed was that God was beginning to open my eyes and I was seeing Christ in the homeless man that Robert was serving. But, I also saw Christ in Robert because he was developing a deep meaning in life through serving others.” You see, Jesus began to talk more and more about following him, discipleship, and what that means. The people didn’t quite get it.

Secondly, maybe the cheering stopped because Jesus dared to love ALL people. You remember that when he went in and cleansed the Temple, the Court of Gentiles had been taken over by the money changers, the vendors, the animals, the sights and the smells. All of these Gentiles could not worship. Jesus was upset because they didn’t have a place to worship God. The Jews were pushing the Gentiles out. **God wanted the Jews to know that the Temple was created to give ALL**

people access to him. God loves all people and there's a diversity of people in the kingdom of God. Jesus dared to love the rich and the poor, the women and the children, the lepers, prostitutes, and ALL people. The Jews didn't want that. The Jews and religious leaders said, "No. We're the chosen people, not all these others." But, Jesus dared to love all people. Sometimes even churches today get upset when certain people get invited in, don't they?

In one of the gospels - Matthew, I think it is - when Jesus cleansed the Temple, it said that after he scooted out all those animals, people, and vendors, the blind and the lame came to him to be healed. The children began to shout, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" The Pharisees said, "Jesus, shut them up," because children were not valued in their day. Jesus welcomed all people, loved all people, and wants us to.

Thirdly, I think there's another bigger reason that the cheering stopped -- that's because Jesus began to talk more and more about the cross, his death, and his sacrifice. The Jews and the disciples wanted a conquering Messiah king who would come over and face the Roman officials. They wanted Jesus to restore the throne of David and put the nation of Israel back in power over everyone, especially the Romans.

Jesus began to talk about a cross more than a crown. He began to talk about suffering, peace, justice, humility, rather than victory, war, and violence. They didn't like that. Have you ever had your expectations exploded? Maybe you wanted one thing and you expected it to be one way and it happened some other way. Teenagers get that way when they are expecting a brand new car at 16, and you come in with a car that's ten years old. I can remember going to college. I had my mind set on going to one, but ended up having to go somewhere else, because I could not get the scholarships and the financial aide that I needed at the first college. I was so disappointed. Have you ever been disappointed? That's the way these people were. Their expectations were shattered, especially when Jesus was arrested that week. "Who wants a king that is going to die? Who wants a king that's been arrested? He's not going to lead us to victory." And they turned against him -- the religious leaders, the Jews --

and the cheering began to stop and they wanted to crucify him. “Crucify him! Crucify him! He’s not our king. He’s not our Messiah.”

I want to share a story with you about a beloved author named Graham Greene. He was a British Author and Novelist – wrote many novels that were made into movies. He died back in the late 90’s. Mr. Greene was an agnostic – he wasn’t sure that he believed in God. But, he heard about a Catholic Priest named Padre Pio who lived in a monastery in Italy. He led mass at a big cathedral there. He was a man who had known Jesus since he was five years old. He felt like Jesus had his hand on his life. It was reported that he had the marks of Jesus in his hands and his feet. They disappeared at some point and then they came back. I don’t know the truth in any of that story -- all I know is that he became a mystic and a saint in the Catholic Church. But, he was one that knew Jesus. Graham Green decided that if anybody could tell him about Jesus and if it was real, he would have to meet this man. It took him two and a half years to get a fifteen-minute appointment set-up with this Catholic priest in Italy. He flew from London to Italy. He went to Catholic mass that morning and when it was over, he caught a taxi, went to the airport, and flew back to London. His best friend asked him, “Why would you do that? You’ve waited for two and a half years to meet with this man. Why would you not do it?” Listen to his answer: “I was not ready for the manner in which this man could change my life.” You see, he wasn’t quite ready to believe yet. (He did come to believe later in life and he turned to Catholicism.)

I want to ask you a question today... As we go through this Holy Week, Jesus has called us as his disciples to walk through the storm of Holy Week with him. It is so easy for us to want to pass it up and ignore it, to take it superficially or lightly, but we can’t have resurrection without crucifixion – without the pain and suffering that Jesus went through. So, this Holy Week, he asks us to walk through the storm with him; to remember his loving sacrifice for us; and to remember that next Sunday is Easter Sunday! Are we ready for the manner in which Jesus can and will change our lives, if we let him? Jesus was caught in the “eye of the storm.” May we walk with him through that storm this week, love and appreciate his sacrifice and crucifixion for us. Are you ready for the

manner in which Christ can and will change you and me, if we let him?
Amen.