

Mark 11:1-11

Our gospel begins with Jesus and the disciples approaching Jerusalem. On the way, Jesus sends two disciples to fetch a donkey. He gives explicit instructions as to where to find it; what to say if they are stopped. The colt is where he said. And people do stop them, just as he said. Everything is unfolding as Jesus had said.

But we forget something. Jesus had also said that he would be arrested, delivered into the hands of the authorities, and killed. Three times he had said this, not as a passing mention but an outright, clearly stated teaching. But such things are hard to hear. Denial is a powerful force; is it not?

They prepare the donkey and continue the journey, with a crowd attending them, leading ahead and following behind. But most people probably just stood and watched and wondered, "What in the world...?" These parading people cut branches from trees and throw them on the road. They drop their coats as a respectful carpet. They begin to shout, "Hosanna!"

Now a word about that. You have certainly seen recordings of street protests whereby some leader shouts, "What do we want?" To which the crowd responds, "Justice!" The leader replies, "When do we want it?" And the crowd shouts, "Now!"

And the chant goes on like that repeatedly as the protestors make their way. "What do we want?... Justice!... When do we want it?... Now!" It's a chant that builds in intensity, drawing both the curious and the enthusiastic.

So, it probably went, with this small parade. "Hosanna!" Which means "Save us now!"

"Hosanna!...Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ...Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!... Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Can you get the picture? Can you sense the energy? This is far different from Jesus walking down the street, as he has for three years now, with people in the entourage beckoning to friends saying, "Come! This is the Teacher...! Come, this is a great healer!... Come! This is the Prophet!

No, this has a different energy. This is a political rally. "Come! This is the King, the Messiah, the son of David! Remember what the scriptures said: [Slide: Text of Zechariah 9:9]

Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The Jews have been waiting. For generations! God had made a covenant that the Messiah would come. The throne of David would be occupied again! The kingdom would be restored! The power of independence, self-determination and freedom would be theirs once more! And the prophet Zechariah had said there would be this sign: the king would come riding on a donkey. This was it! "Hosanna!"

Now, this is strange. Doubtless there were armed Roman soldiers watching this tiny parade, listening to the mounting excitement. Perhaps their nerves were getting a littler jittery. But not likely. This was obviously no military parade. Jesus did not have armed guards. There were no horns, no banners. No chariot. No war horses. Just a Jewish peasant, sitting on a donkey. This was no threat, just a harmless demonstration by harmless people....

Jesus did not attempt to quiet the crowds. No stern looks. No wave of the hand. No “hush.” This was unfolding as Jesus anticipated. He had warned of his arrest. The donkey was there. The crowd was there. But this would not lead to a confrontation. That would not be his way. And yet, the scripture said this would be a triumphant event. A victory celebration. And yet, remember it is happening on Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem, at the beginning of the week, the week he would die.

I want to reflect on this familiar dramatic event and also the events that will follow in this week of Jesus’ passion. And I want to tie Jesus’ sovereignty to our emphasis on the care of creation.

I propose that Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and what would unfold in the next few days reveal very strong values Jesus brings to his ministry and approach to the kingdom of heaven, values Jesus would expect of those of us gathered here as his disciples and followers. We are, after all, one.

Values like these: (post on slides)

Leadership without domination;

Simplicity and voluntary poverty;

Humility;

Downward mobility (– I’ll explain that in a moment);

Non-violent peace-making;

Hospitality;

and Generosity.

[Slide: Lead without Domination]

Jesus would lead without domination. Jesus would subjugate no one. I start with dominion because ever since Genesis, people inside the church and outside the church have assumed that humankind is the last of creation, the best of creation, and as such, humankind is placed on this earth to have dominion over creation. The earth and all its resources and creatures were created first, and humankind was put here to extract those resources, domesticate the animals, harvest the crops, and thrive comfortably.

Jesus was not interested in dominating anyone. He would indeed teach about the differences between the Creator and the creature, between the Master and the servant, between the owner and the hired hand. But Jesus emphasized role and responsibility in the fulfillment of one’s purposes and the attainment of the common good, rather than emphasizing rank, status, or power. The king, the leader, the wealthy, the educated, were to apply their gifts and skills for the care of the community, for the protection and provision for the poor, for the well-being of the community – what we would call justice.

[Slide: Simplicity]

So, Jesus chose the pattern and approach of simplicity. He would not worry about maintaining a home or ensuring an income. He would trust others to provide; and he in turn would provide what he could provide. He taught that the laborer was worthy of his – or her - hire. At the same time, the authorized and sent disciples were not to go from place to place looking for better food, a nicer place to stay, and any other advantage. Don't worry about the material stuff. Don't strive to get wealthy. Take no bag, no staff, no extra clothing.

[Slide: Philippians 2:5-8]

What does the epistle say? Philippians 2:5-8 (post on a slide)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

[Slide: Humility and Downward Mobility]

Today humility and servanthood don't seem to be widely held attributes among the elite and the powerful, and their base people who support them.

I use the term "downward mobility" to capture this orientation to Christ's self-emptying, to his assuming the role of servant, choosing to serve, rather than be served. We will see more of that on Maundy Thursday.

[Slide: Non-Violent Peace-making]

I want to touch on non-violent peacemaking. In the final days, when confronted by Pilate and the soldiers, Jesus would insist that his disciples not defend themselves with weapons. According to Matthew, Jesus allowed them to bring with them two swords. But "that will be enough." And, when the time came, Jesus would insist that Peter not draw his own sword. Jesus would be nose to nose with the highest Roman authority in the region, and Pilate would snarl, "Don't you know who I am? Do you know what you are charged with? Your people handed you over to me! Answer me!" But Jesus would not take the bait. He would not escalate.... He would also face the High Priest who would tear his own clothes in frustrated rage, but Jesus would not respond.

[Slide: Hospitality]

A couple more virtues. Hospitality. Jesus had this way of making the outcasts, the poor, the prostitutes and tax collectors, all society's "others," feel that they were welcome. Jesus would break the rules about eating together and touching one another. He would feed 5,000 on one occasion and 4,000 on another. He would provide wine for a wedding when the provisions of the host ran short. He would perform miracles of healing. He would see those whom others refused to see and speak with people whom respectable people would ignore. On the last night with his disciples, Jesus would break bread and pour the wine. Jesus would wash their feet. And, after the resurrection, after a frustrating night of the disciples fishing without results, Jesus would prepare fish on the beach.

[Slide: Generosity]

All of this speaks of a generosity of spirit. Jesus could trust in God the Father providing what was required. Jesus had the capacity for contentment. He had very little room for anxiety. Jesus valued cooperation over competition. Jesus trusted in the God of abundance, not scarcity and was confident there would be enough.

So, you might say, these are attributes and values Jesus would expect from his followers! He led by example. But that example could be daunting, couldn't it? Can we find these qualities in ourselves? Consistently? Especially when push comes to shove?

Not much good news here. However, if we share the same breath as Jesus; if we have the same Spirit; if we share the same heart, then these virtues are not challenges to ourselves but rather gifts. Especially when we need them.

Now what does all this have to do with the care of creation?

As we move more deeply into the care of creation, we must call for movement, broad movement, especially among the affluent and developed countries, to greater simplicity. The resources of this world have been given us abundantly. But our economy is based on scarcity. There are only so many customers, so we compete for attention, purchases, investment. We promote consumption. And the products we consume are increasingly replaceable. The quality is not there. Craftsmanship is not like that in the days of grandparents. Things do not last, because we need to keep consumers buying, laborers working, dollars flowing. There is never enough. As soon as you feel comfortable... for instance, as soon as you think you have bought the last car you will ever buy – something breaks down – expenses are greater than the vehicle is worth – and there are new features you simply cannot live without! Or so they say.

Society does not foster contentment; we foster anxiety. Society does not foster generosity; we foster competition, acquisition, with appropriate seasonal charity.

Society fosters a myth that the economy will always grow. But we have only one planet! The resources of this planet are physically limited. The market to buy what we produce is not determined just by increasing population, but by the capacity to purchase what we produce at affordable and fair prices. What other measures of economic growth are there than Gross Domestic Product?

[Slide : five other measures]]

According to the World Economic Forum there are at least five other measures that could indicate whether our economy is healthy and growing.

[Slide: good jobs]

One is good jobs. We keep complaining about unemployment rates and the risk of policies resulting in job loss. What about measuring whether people have good jobs? Whether people are well paid? Whether jobs are sustainable – will they still be here in six months, three years, five years? Does the work we have provide a good standard of living?

In the UK 61% have secure jobs that provide a liveable wage. Only 61%

[Slide: Well-being]

What about measuring well-being? How satisfied are people with their lives? Is satisfaction improving or falling? Do people have the income they desire, the health care they need, the housing that is safe and affordable, and social conditions like transportation, recreation and public safety?

In the UK, the satisfaction rate is 7.6 on a scale of 0 to 10.

[Slide: environment]

What about the environment? How are we doing in reducing carbon emissions? Not just slowing their production but reclaiming carbon out of the atmosphere? How is the air quality? What about access to sufficient and drinkable water? What about contaminated soil?

Again, in the UK, emission standards are 2% below the limit necessary to avoid danger from continuing climate change.

[Slide: fairness]

Another measure is fairness. Consider income inequality. The gap between the rich and the poor has grave social consequences. After tax income in the UK for the top ten percent of wage earners is 8.7 times greater than the lower ten percent. And the COVID crisis has revealed that there is a great discrepancy between the rich and the poor in terms of access to treatment, risk of infection, access to testing. The climate crisis has revealed that the women, poor, and people of color suffer to a greater degree because of industrial pollution and toxic dumping, because the placement of those sites is more likely where they live than in wealthier neighborhoods.

[Slide: health]

Lastly, for now, consider health as a measure of economic well-being. Again, access is an issue, treatment and prevention are factors. Look at birth rates and death rates. In England and Wales twenty-three percent of all deaths are preventable!

By now you must realize that the care of creation involves more than carbon emissions, sustainable energy, pollution, plastic and extinction. Care of creation is more than managing resources. Care of creation has to do with care of people. As the saying goes, "Climate justice is social justice."

Back to Jesus, his values, and the implications for our care of creation.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. He was not interested in having dominion over people or subjugating people. Jesus cared about people more than social norms and practices. People mattered more than profits.

In today's lesson, Jesus enters Jerusalem, has a look around and leaves for another time. However, in other gospels Jesus goes straight to the Temple and throws out the money changers, the market keepers, the people who have turned the House of Prayer into a market for profits.

People matter more than profits. Look at what we are arguing over now. Your right to go about your business without a mask is greater than another's right to safety and protection. Your right to open your business or take a trip or get your nails done is greater than another's right to life. We have one government arguing that we must restore jobs and keep the fossil fuel sector viable another thirty to fifty years. While another government argues that a carbon tax is required to defer profits from further

developing infrastructure, and influencing consumer consumption practices, or we won't be in business in thirty to fifty years.

Of course, people matter! Of course, we want people to have jobs. And – not but – but and – we want clean water and secure food production and access to housing, health, education and transportation. There is more to the bottom line than the profit and loss bottom line.

So, we come back to the value of humility. Enough blaming and shaming and threatening. Enough criticism. Let's move beyond what's going wrong and imagine what could be right. Let's open communication, listening to one another and seeking mutual benefit. Let's together discover a new vision and restore commonality.

If I have not irritated you yet, I probably will now.

[Slide: simplicity and voluntary poverty]

Let's talk about the value of simplicity. I called that voluntary poverty. Let's be real. I'm not saying we all will move to the refugee camps, while handing the displaced persons the keys to our homes and vehicles.

But, remember only 67% of wage earners make a liveable wage. Remember, the top 10 % of wage earners - and we're not talking about the world's billionaires - make 8.7 times more than the bottom 10%. Nobody wants enforced poverty. Nobody likes unfair taxes. Nobody wants economic rebalancing by violence.

But when we talk about simplicity, why do we always focus on what we are going to lose? Why do we focus on what we have to give up? Why do we forget to measure with gratitude the abundance we have? And why do we see the poor as a threat? Obviously because wealth is scarce, and we will lose, and we will give up!

A study I read suggested that when we talk about a just economy, and rebalanced wealth, we fear we will be back in the 1920's and 1930's. Joblessness and bread lines and crime. The article suggested our lifestyle might be no worse off than the late seventies! I thought the seventies was a wonderful decade. Lots of comfort. Lots of opportunity. Maybe we aren't remembering well or imagining well.

We come back to the pattern: no subjugation of anyone; working, planning, communicating, humbly and equitably.

[Slide: rebalanced economy]

We do need a rebalanced economy. Let me remind you what economy means. "Economy" comes from the words "oikos" and "nomos". It means "the rule of the house", the management of the house, the oversight so all that was necessary got done well. Economy is more than the market.

We can no longer focus only on our jobs, our homes, our vehicles, our holidays, our cottages, our advantages. It's not about "look at me." It's about look at one another – look after one another.

We can no longer be blind. The verses immediately before this gospel are all about those who can see quite well enough, but they are truly blind. And those who are blind can see what others will not see.

And that includes Jesus. And that's the context into which Jesus is riding. That's the context in which Jesus will die.

[Slide: Our Common Home]

This is Our Common Home. We must seek the common good. If you have trouble imagining what the kingdom of heaven is like, I think there is some light in this concept of the common good. St. Francis sought the common good, and the common good extended beyond human beings to all God's creatures. Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si*, and more recently in *Fratelli Tutti*, is calling the church – and all people of good will everywhere- to return to a spirit of justice and compassion – for all humanity and for all creation.

[Slide: Care for Our Common Home – Not stuff – But Relationships]

Caring for Our Common Home is not so much about stuff – not oil or fish or pipelines or pollution. Care of Our Common Home is about relationships. St. Francis knew this in the thirteenth century. In his Canticle of Creation he wrote about Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brothers Wind and Air, and Sister Water, Brother Fire and Sister Earth. Even Death is our Sister.

Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*, is calling for a restoring of relationships; we are all brothers and sisters.

Go back to the scriptures and read very carefully what Jesus had to say about masters and servants. Read carefully. Things go badly when relationships are sacrificed to advantage. Things go well when we are reconciled to God and to one another.

Read what Jesus said in John 15:15. "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

Read Galatians 4:7 "So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

And read Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The thesis of Care of Creation as a Lenten Journey is that God, the Creator, together with Jesus the Christ, and the Wisdom of the Holy Spirit, all were part of creation, from the beginning until now. Christ embraced our creation, becoming one with humanity, with origins in the dust and with a future in the dust. And embracing all the dust creatures means embracing all creatures, not just humanity. We are one – in origin, in future, in Christ. So these weeks we have seen Christ embracing the wonder, beauty and majesty of creation, in the same way that Christ embraced us, in dignity and in death.

This is the beginning of Christ's passion. This is Christ's passion for all humanity. And for all creation. the message of the passion is that Christ suffers with creation. Just as Christ suffers with us, even to death, a most shameful, unnecessary, unjust death.

Now that's not the end of the story. But we cannot understand or appreciate the ending, without this beginning. That's how this simple entrance can be victorious already.

And we, one with Christ, in dust and in Spirit, cannot appreciate the renewal of creation, without participating in the sorrows of creation. Care of creation is not an option. Care of creation is not an add-on ministry. Care of creation is all about relationships broken and relationships restored. But it is relationships restored that points to the end of the story, the fulfillment of Love and the new creation of all being.

To be continued....