

SERMON: 2018/03/25 (Palm Sunday in Lent, Year B) - Mk. 11:1-11_BTR

Today, in our gospel reading, we heard about how Jesus finally arrived at Jerusalem where He was predicted to die; and He came riding on a young donkey and accompanied by some well-wishers and friends.

Now, Matthew says that '[a] very large crowd' was there to meet Him [21:8], and John describes it as being very 'great' [12:12]; but Mark speaks only of '[m]any people'; and unlike in Galilee, Jesus' home, where He was something of a celebrity, here, in the busy capital city, where lots of famous and rich people lived, *this* moment was probably rather modest.

Indeed, it was likely a bit disappointing for (at least a few of) the disciples, some of whom *still* thought that Jesus was going to do something politically dramatic and violent:[n.1]

We know that a few were even carrying swords at this time [Mt. 26:51; Mk. 14:47 & Lk. 22:38], and it may be that they were hoping Jesus would gather an army of zealots for a *fight* against the Roman bullies.[n.1]

But He didn't.

And - *initially* - it was, well, anti-climactic, which means not a "big deal."

And yet despite these facts - this under-whelming, almost embarrassing turn-of-affairs, the Church calls Jesus' arrival, "The Triumphal Entry;" which sounds like (self-delusional) "spin" doesn't it?

Like an exaggeration.

Especially when you know that we've borrowed this name from a phenomenon that was common in the Roman world:

The "triumph."

The "triumph" was a *huge* parade - like the Macy's Thanksgiving one in New York - that the Senate - that's the old guys who were in charge of the empire - would organize to celebrate the return to the capital of a successful general.

And it was *awesome!*

Involving *thousands* of participants, marching in sequence.

First came the musicians blowing great big trumpets - prrfff! [Blow a horn.]

And with them the drummers - [bang drum].

Often they were followed by fierce, wild animals captured in exotic places: lions,

leopards, tigers, etcetera. [Throw cuddly toys at the congregation.]

[Playmobil Roman chariot] Then, the most important person in the procession came along, riding in a chariot pulled along by four beautiful, majestic horses: pure white or jet black.

One famous soldier – Pompey – swapped them out for a team of elephants:

Elephants!

Just imagine it!

Side by side, they were so massive that the chariot couldn't fit through the city gates!

(And, one-by-one, they had to be unhitched, led through the archway, and then re-attached.)

Behind them were the soldiers.

Row upon row of brave, battle-hardened legionaries.

Thousands of them!

Some carried severed-heads on tall spears. [Throw pink balloons with unhappy faces drawn on.]

[Shackles] And hundreds of slaves – prisoners-of-war; including naked women. [Chuck nude Barbie.]

Servants would even throw bread [toss bread rolls] at the crowd and money. [Throw gold plastic coins up into the air.]

And they did all this whenever they won an important battle over their enemies.

So, why have Christians borrowed the name of this *amazing* party for Jesus' quaint little jaunt on a donkey?

Because He *was* on His way to win a "war" - one that would be the greatest in all history: over death and the devil - *our* enemies.

The most *terrible*, powerful enemies ever.

And He was going to do it all by Himself.

- Something that no number of Roman legions could do.

Jesus' "Triumphal Entry," then, is a *wonderful* paradox: an eeny, meeny, teeny-*tiny* celebration for *the most GLORIOUS(!!!)* victory of all time.

Amen.

Footnotes:

1. See, for example: Martin, Dale B. (2014), 'Jesus in Jerusalem: Armed and Not Dangerous', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Volume 37, No. 1, pp. 3-24.