

MARK 11:1-11; 15-18

Jesus and his disciples were now approaching Jerusalem and when they reached Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples with these instructions: “Go to the village opposite and just as you enter, you will find there a colt which no one has yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks ‘Why are you doing that’, say Our Master needs it and will send it back here without delay.”

So they went off and found the colt tethered at a door outside in the street. They were untying it when some of the bystanders asked, “What are you doing untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them and were then allowed to take it.

So they brought the colt to Jesus and spread their cloaks on it, and he mounted. And people carpeted the road with their cloaks, while others spread brushwood which they had cut in the fields. And those who went ahead and the others who came behind shouted, “Hosanna! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the heavens!” Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple where he looked at the whole scene. But as it was now late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve...

So they came to Jerusalem and he went into the temple and began

driving out those who bought and sold in the temple. He upset the tables of the money changers and the seats of the dealers in pigeons and he would not allow anyone to use the temple courts as a thoroughfare for carrying goods. Then he began to teach them and said, "Does not Scripture say, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a robbers' cave." The chief priests and the doctors of the law heard this and sought some means of making away with him for they were afraid of him because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, he went out of the city.

PROFIT OR PROPHET?

MARK 11:1-11; 15-18

How did it get to this point? Have you ever felt as if you had lost control over your destiny and that you are clinging to a raft going through class five rapids and that the best you can do is hang on for dear life? As I ponder the events leading to Holy Week, I wonder about the forces converging upon Jesus and his disciples. I ask myself how it is that a man who from nowhere, really, emerged onto the scene of Nazarene life could

somehow recruit a group of disciples who went about with him into the countryside and into villages preaching and healing...could become such a thorn in the hide of so many powerful people? What was the threat he posed to the establishment? Was it intentional? Was he calling too much attention to the elephants in the room and presenting political problems for the authorities? The answer to this question is Yes. He clearly meant to do it.

It was a gamble and it led to the dramatic conclusion to his ministry. What had gotten under the skin of the Jewish authorities was Jesus' popularity underscored by one too many dramatic healings—Lazarus being the last straw because it was giving credence to his followers' messianic claims about him. Was a populist movement taking shape around him? It is dangerous to expose the corruption of those in power.

The pressure point between Jesus and his opposition was the approach of Passover. It was a high energy season and pilgrims by the thousands were converging upon Jerusalem. As the Jewish authorities feared it made the time ripe for an insurrection. So, they were on the watch—as were the Romans who wanted no trouble from the Jews.

Jesus, however, seemed eager to take advantage of this tension by setting up the parade that would accompany him to the Temple. Because

he knew that by reputation, he would attract lots of attention. And he would use that attention to provoke a serious confrontation with those who were profaning the Temple through their corruption and profiteering.

Change only happens when enough people force it to occur.

But it was late when he arrived at the Temple so he withdrew and waited until the next day when a large crowd would be shopping. And you have to understand that the Temple was not a big synagogue. It was more like a mall—about the size of five football fields containing a huge marketplace. This was like a Jewish Black Friday with merchants everywhere hawking their goods—not exactly a sacred gathering! And when Jesus went in and caused a riot by interrupting enterprise, he sealed his fate.

So Palm Sunday is many things. The Gospel writers interpreted it as the fulfillment of Scripture and an endorsement of their messianic claims. But to me, it is much more than that. Because I see it on another level as a confrontation we must all face in our spiritual lives. As the title of the sermon suggests, we continually make choices between Prophet and Profit. In other words, do we place our allegiance with a system that heavily favors the establishment and disenfranchises the least among us to preserve its power and control of wealth? It is a question of all ages since

humans have walked this earth.

Naturally, we have mixed motives. If the system favors us, that's just the way it is. We can't deny that. Yet, a significant activity in anyone's spiritual evolution must include honest self-examination. So we have to ask ourselves over and over where we are compromising.

We know what our elected officials do. Following the census every ten years, they redraw new boundaries for the electoral districts working very hard to ensure their re-election by rigging the system in their favor, creating obstacles to vote for those in the opposition and continuing to expand the ability of big donors to make nearly unlimited contributions. By the time all is said and done, elections on the local and state levels are basically forgone conclusions.

This is the sort of behavior Jesus confronted throughout his ministry, culminating in the dramatic events in the Temple the day after the Triumphal Entry. Being a profiteer requires you to focus solely on yourself and how you can manipulate others to achieve your personal goals. Being a prophet, on the other hand, requires the guts to look at the world through the eyes of God. And doing that can get you crucified!

How we perceive and think about things is a choice. If we stop at our own internal sound bites and knee jerk responses to current events and

people who fall outside of our personal orbits, we risk unwitting collaboration with the profiteers and the den of thieves. Isn't it a lot easier to ally ourselves with so-called established truths than it is do our own research and explore and what is really going on? Palm Sunday challenges us to engage in deep reflection. We must all choose to live our faith as we see fit. It goes way beyond whatever lip service we may pay to the calls to service that Christ lays at our feet. As Paul said, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

Dare we cry: *Hosanna! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest?*

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