

Exploring the Story in: Mark 11:12-25

Spellbound

Jesus is in his last days and he is running out of patience. He doesn't have time for this nonsense in the temple where the money changers were providing small coins for those who were buying doves to use in sacrificial rituals. It was all about unnecessary practices and missing the point of what God was about with this new messiah. How disappointing it must have been for Jesus to see so many people, his people, using the temple for something other than what it was consecrated to be used for: the worship of God.

We could say more about how we expect Jesus was feeling and sensing and thinking as he spends his last week in Jerusalem. There are clues to direct our speculations here. But I would rather spend time on the less divine characters, the people Mark identifies as simply "the crowd." They are the ones we know more about from our own perspective for their experience is more similar to our own. We are familiar with a little idol worship here and there, be it just the right label on our clothing or, on a greater scale, worship in the temples of Wall Street where we seek the security that, nevertheless, often eludes us. We are in that crowd that was "spellbound" by Jesus' teaching because it was, what, so opposite of anything heard before? Is the crowd stunned beyond words by this one who acts with authority and is willing to question the scrambled religious practice of the scribes and chief priests? I think that was surely part of it. But mostly I believe the crowd was captured by the pure truth of God that the man Jesus claimed to represent. They saw, uninformed and unsophisticated as they were, a sight never witnessed before: the power of God at street level, spoken and enacted by one who claimed to be sent from God. The man was, as had been said at the time of his birth, God with us. No wonder they were spellbound!

- *The Rev. Dr. James Carter*

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 119:73-80, 145
- Evening Ps. 121, 6
- Lam. 1:1-2, 6-12
- 2 Cor. 1:1-7
- Mark 11:12-25

Prayer

O Lord, take us beyond our childish "gee whizz" theological response to one that reflects a life of faith and obedience. We are in awe of your presence and power in our lives. Amen

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 34, 146
- Evening Ps. 25, 91
- Lam. 1:17-22
- 2 Cor. 1:8-22
- Mark 11:27-33

Exploring the Story in: Mark 11:27-33

Questions and Answers

Jesus certainly managed to stir things up wherever he went, didn't he? Here he is again in a faceoff with religious authorities. The establishment that has a lot invested in keeping things as they are. So threatened are they by Jesus' display of power, a power that even the establishment is willing to believe just may actually come from God, as had been claimed. So threatened are they by Jesus in their part of the city that they quickly turn to plans for a violent response. What is it about this lone man with a few disciples in his wake that makes grown, wise, powerful men think in terms of violence as the best way to deal with the disturbance? What makes them so afraid that they are ready to kill the point man who has never raised any other than his voice in their presence?

The answer is found in looking at ourselves, once again, in order to ask, "What do we fear enough to resort to violence to protect ourselves and all that we consider sacred?" Do we fear the loss of our freedom when God enters our midst? Do we think we will lose our identity if we allow ourselves to be caught up in activities and causes that are not of our choosing? Do we suppose that having faith is the same as surrendering control over all dimensions of our living? Whatever is going on with us in those moments of fear is what was going on with those leaders in Jerusalem. They feared that their lives would no longer be the same if they followed this messiah. And, of course, they were absolutely correct.

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Prayer

O Lord God, help us to respond to your presence among us with welcoming hearts and minds. Help us to see that we have much more to fear when we live apart from you than when we live with you. Cast out our angry and violent thoughts toward others and make us instruments of your peace in all we say and do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Exploring the Story in: Mark 12:1-11

Taking Things into Our Own Hands

It's never a good idea to take on an opponent who can beat you at your own game. It is never a good idea to pick a fight with one or many who can destroy you if they choose to. The closest most of us will ever get to this truism, apart from seeing combat in a time at war, is likely a struggle with the I.R.S. or with city hall or, perhaps, a labor union. By their very size and power they are able to prevail. You would not expect to hear me suggesting that this is also the way things are when we take on the power of God but something like that is going on here in this parable and, guess what: God is the most powerful force against all those who rise up in violent, unlawful and unscrupulous opposition. God does not put up with such offensive behavior indefinitely. God punishes the wrongdoers. They are called to answer for their sin. They are accountable. Well, we say, that is certainly a relief for all of us law-abiding citizens of the law of the state and the law of God. That is just how things should be, we say. Thank goodness there is order in the world now and chaos has been subdued. But that really is not the way things are in the world we live in now any more than it was in the world in which Jesus lived. There is still confusion and chaos and self-interest outdoing altruistic behaviors. There are still those who lie and cheat and conspire and steal for the benefit of themselves, just as there were in Jesus' time. And, yes, there are still those who will kill God's messengers and their message in order to protect themselves from undue interference from a power they suspect is greater than their own. God is a threat to those who oppose any power greater than their own. That is why there was a crucifixion. But as dark as was the act on the day we call Good Friday, in the Week we call Holy, the powers of evil did not then, and do not now, have the last word. That word is God's and the word is life for all who believe in his power.

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Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 5, 147:1-11
- Evening Ps. 27, 51
- Lam. 2:1-9
- 2 Cor. 1:23-2:11
- Mark 12:1-11

Prayer

Thanks be to God for saving us from the powers of death.
Amen.

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 27, 147:12-20
- Evening Ps. 126, 102
- Lam. 2:10-18
- 1 Cor. 10:14-17, 11:27-32
- Mark 14:12-25

Exploring the Story in: Mark 14:12-25

“Lord, is it I?”

We know this scene well. We see it re-enacted, in part, in our order of the communion service. We are not comfortable with the statement about betrayal, however. That is not the way we like to think about the disciples and it certainly is not the way we like to think about ourselves. We prefer accounts of courageous, loyal subjects who do the bidding of their Lord willingly. We seek to avoid those who are known to be on the fence about the leader. Anyone who would take a bribe, as Judas Iscariot did, is to be kept at a distance, we think to ourselves. We don't want to consider ourselves as even tempted by telling more than we should about one whom we serve or work with or call friend.

But the truth is, each time we engage in gossip that can damage a reputation or a life we are in the company of Judas. Each time we deny knowing a friend who is under investigation for insider trading we are in the company of Peter. Each time we fail to stand firm for an unpopular cause that we know in our hearts is right, we fail our Lord's mandate. And what is the mandate that gives Maundy Thursday its name? It is the mandate from Jesus that we love one another as he has loved us. If we do that, all the other temptations fade and lose their power to corrupt us.

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Prayer

Forgive us, O Lord, for all the times we have failed you. Forgive us those moments when we denied our identity as your disciples. Forgive us for those moments and days when we have not borne the name of Christ as we have been called to do. Amen.

Exploring the Story in: John 19:38-42



Valerie Craig, *Moody Blues Oil*

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 22, 148
- Evening Ps. 105, 130
- Lam. 3:1-9, 19-33
- 1 Peter 1:10-20
- John 13:36-38 or John 19:38-42

Prayer

Merciful God, You gave your Son in love, the one who was willing to suffer the shame of the cross for all the world. Save us from hardness of heart, that, seeing him who died for us, we may repent, confess our sin, and receive your overflowing love and Word of life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Adapted from *The Book of Common Worship*

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 43, 149
- Evening Ps. 31, 143
- Lam. 3:37-58
- Heb. 4:1-16
- Rom. 8:1-11

Exploring the Story in: Psalm 43

Evening Prayer

We have come to the end of our Lenten journey. You have been faithful in your practice with these readings and reflections. Together we have become sensitized again to the beauty of the scriptures and the poignant story that is the life of our Lord. He lived such a short time by today's standards, yet managed in that brief time to change the world and put humanity on a new course. Let us never forget that. We would be followers of someone or something else had Christ not lived and taught and healed and died for us. And if there were no resurrection, imagine what lack of hope for living in God's company forever would be ours. I say all of this to remind myself and all of us that on the evening of Holy Saturday all hope appeared to be lost for those who called themselves the followers of Jesus. He was dead and buried in a tomb. So to pray a prayer such as Psalm 43, and mean it, is to pray with the most courageous faith we can imagine. The psalmist has not given up on God though the writer lived hundreds of years before Jesus began his ministry. "O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling" he prayed in faith. It would have been an appropriate prayer for the remnant who had kept watch as Jesus died on Friday. No doubt many there knew the psalms by heart for they were the original prayer book. It is as good a prayer for the mourner as you will find in the psalms. It declares what needs to be said, however difficult it is at such a time to believe that there is for us a dwelling in God's company. Let us end this day with this psalmist's evening prayer. We anticipate the dawn with the insider's knowledge of what happens next. We know there was a resurrection and we know it has changed our take on the powers of death. But let us not forget too soon the faithful before us who believed that God would prevail somehow, some day. Little did they know then that on the day we now call Easter, hell's power would be destroyed as God gave the world Heaven.

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Prayer

Thanks be to you, O God, for giving us hope in our despair and light in our darkness. Amen.