

“Living the Life: Entering Our Jerusalem”  
Mark 11:1-11

Jerusalem has recently been in the news with the decision of the United States government to move the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as a recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel. (Image of Jerusalem on screen) The decision has not been well received by many people in the world because Jerusalem is supposed to be a city that is shared between Palestinians and Israelis. Its political status has been a point of contention for many years. If you have ever travelled to Jerusalem, you know that there are different parts in the city occupied by different religious and ethnic groups. And unfortunately, this kind of political struggle is not new to that city which has witnessed so many political and military struggles. It is supposed to be one of the holiest cities in the world and yet it is one of the most conflicted. The literal meaning of the name in Hebrew is “to see peace” and the Arabic name for Jerusalem is “Al-Quds” which means “holy.” But the ancient and current daily realities of the city are far from both meanings. And I think that is precisely why it could be a great metaphor for our lives and the complexity of living with the promise of wholeness and the struggles of brokenness. In our willingness to enter into the depth of our brokenness lies the promise of our wholeness. Living the life God calls us to live is not about living the “perfect” life but is about being willing to enter more fully into all aspects of life, especially when life is painful or scary.

This is the example Jesus left us with his entry into Jerusalem. We often think of it as a triumphal entry, as that of a king. But it was a lot more complex than that. Jesus entered into a city that had witnessed many parades of military leaders and rulers from King David to Pilate. And most of these parades did not end up fulfilling God’s vision for the world. The festivities and the hopes of the people for renewal were high with each one, but each of these leaders had not been able to fulfill the promise and hope of peace and holiness that is at the heart of the vision for the city. And all of that I believe is because these leaders relied on the powers of an army and human violence to bring peace into the city and the world. They believed that human might and strength to be the means to a lasting peace in the world.

Jesus was different. There are several elements in this very familiar story that were intentionally radical in order to wake people up to a new narrative of faith and new possibilities for peace. First, the parade that we celebrate as Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, didn’t happen exactly in Jerusalem. This was on the way to Jerusalem. The second piece we see is that Jesus’ entry was not triumphant. According to Mark, Jesus came into the temple, looked around, and then simply left to Bethany. The expectation of the people was for him to do something triumphant and dramatic right away. It is important for us to remember that they were living under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire and were waiting for someone to save them. That is what “Hosanna” literally means, “save us.” The significance in the palm branches (or the branches from the field) and “Hosanna’s” are found in Jewish history about one hundred fifty years earlier. A hero, by the name of Simon Maccabaeus (image on screen) had delivered Jerusalem from the Seleucids (Greek Empire) through military force. On that occasion,

which is known as the Second Maccabaean Revolt, a great celebration was held with praise, palm branches, and musical instruments (1 Mc 13:51). So, the palms became a symbol of the Jews' desire for deliverance. Jesus was supposed to be a military leader that would deal with the fears of the people, the corruption of the religious leaders and the oppression of the Roman Empire. He was supposed to be the Messiah, which meant in their day, a military leader that would lead a violent revolt against the oppressors of his people.

But Jesus' entry was different because he came on a lowly animal and not a steed. The donkey was a symbol of powerlessness and the peasantry. He was welcomed by the peasants, those who were oppressed by the powers. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey instead of a horse. This was a very intentional choice on his part. In fact, the author of the Gospel of Mark spent several verses on the details of getting the donkey and how Jesus sent for it specifically. This was all to say that Jesus' parade was not just another religious celebration. His parade was calling for a change in the social, spiritual, and social consciousness of the people. He showed them that brokenness is the way to wholeness and peace. Accepting our vulnerability and dependence on God is what makes us truly strong. Yet, everything in us seems to resist being vulnerable like Jesus was. We have a hard time opening up about our pain. We hide our fears and imperfections, if not suppress them completely. We strive to succeed and feel so humiliated when we fail. We judge others for their failures in order to make ourselves feel superior. We basically work against our own wholeness, even on the larger scales of life as groups and nations. Yet, courage is about entering our own Jerusalems with hearts open to love and to healing.

In the movie *The Way*, we hear the story of a father who received the worst news of his life. The father had a hard time understanding his son's lack of push to have a stable job with good income and stability. The father thought the good life was about having a nice house, having a solid job, and playing golf on the weekend. His son was different. He was a free spirit. He decided to travel to discover himself. Then the worst news came to him that his son who was walking The Camino de Santiago died in a storm on the way. The pilgrimage of The Camino de Santiago is known as The Way of Saint James. It is one of the oldest and most traveled Christian pilgrimage journeys. Located in France and Spain, pilgrims begin the journey with a blank Camino pilgrim passport, which they fill with stamps at stops along the way. After traveling hundreds of miles on foot, pilgrims arrive at the Cathedral of St. James and show their completed Camino passport to receive a compostela, a certificate of accomplishment for completing the way. This father (played by Martin Sheen) finds his whole world turned upside down with the death of his son, but he did not know what to do with his pain. The irony of it is that he was an eye doctor who helped people see better but he could not see his way of this struggle. As he goes to France to collect the remains of his son, he decides to go on the pilgrimage himself. At first, he struggles with his journey. He is filled with anger and is unable to connect with people around him. He isolates himself and keeps his pain hidden from the others on the path. Here is a scene when he keeps one of his companions on the pilgrimage at arm's length when she tries to find out what he was carrying in the box: (minute 1:11:10 to 1:11:32)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OA6aq85WhXU&list=PL36YU6a8H9cB60guz-gSXXix6\\_fjRaIWS](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OA6aq85WhXU&list=PL36YU6a8H9cB60guz-gSXXix6_fjRaIWS)

What ends up saving his life was the ability to open up and share some of his pain with others and with God. This vulnerability and sharing brings him incredible healing that the end we see him ready to scatter his son's ashes in the ocean when he has a vivid experience of his presence and his connection with him. (Show minute 2:03 to 2:04:49). That is the power of vulnerability which Jesus was modeling for his disciples and for all of us as we seek to live the life God calls us to live. I invite you to take time reflect on what it means for you this week to enter into your own Jerusalem where there is great fear, but also great promise for peace and wholeness. The way we will do that is by taking a few moments to prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper to be open to his presence. Complete the following sentence according to where you are in life right now. "My Jerusalem is \_\_\_\_\_"

Today as you identify your Jerusalem, whether it is your personal one or that of another or that of the community around you, may your faith be strong that our Lord has entered into Jerusalem before us and will continue to do so each and every day. David Lose says that "Jesus overturns the prevailing assumptions about power and security by inviting the disciples to imagine that abundant life comes not through gathering power but through displaying vulnerability, not through accomplishments but through service, and not by collecting powerful friends but by welcoming children. These are small things when you think about it. Serving others, opening yourself to another's need, being honest about your own needs and fears, showing kindness to a child, welcoming a stranger. But they are available to each and all of us every single day. And each time we make even the smallest of these gestures in faith – that is, find the strength and courage to reach out to another in compassion even when we are afraid – we will find our fear lessened, replaced by an increasingly resolute confidence that fear and death do not have the last word." Amen.