

Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

Sermon

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Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

1225 Piper Boulevard, Naples, FL 34110

Long Ago Dreams

Mark 11:1-11

Everybody loves a parade — colorful floats, flashy bands, sassy twirlers, goofy clowns. From small towns to big cities, parades are big events and good times. Memorial Day, New Years Day, Independence Day, Labor Day — all good days for parades. People line the streets along the route. Kids squeeze to the front row or sit on the curb. Little ones balance on their parents' shoulders. Folks in the back strain on tip toe. Some, Zacchaeus like, even climb trees to catch sight of everything. Politicians work the crowds. Police keep an eye on things. Candy for the kids - not to mention the adults. Everybody loves a parade.

Sometimes spectators join the parade. Have you noticed? People get so excited they step off the curb and march along. They may not even know what the parade's all about. Yet, in between this float and that band you'll see one, five, or ten people walking along waving at the crowd. Some might even be twirling or dancing. You can tell they hadn't planned to be there; they aren't dressed for the part. Nevertheless, they're in the parade. Maybe they were drunk. Maybe they were just taking a dare. Maybe they just got caught up in the fun. Who knows? Some walked a block or two. Some walked the whole route. They started out as spectators; but they ended up participants.

That's the way a lot of people become Christians. Like one of those parade watchers, they come to watch and get all caught up in things. Some of us may have joined the church that way. Maybe we came with our parents before we could even talk. We watched people stand and sit. We listened as they sang and prayed. We looked into their faces, observed their smiles, their tears. And we wondered what was going on. We yawned and were bored. We passed notes and made jokes. We never really intended to get involved. Yet one day, for some reason, we stepped off the curb and there we were. Or maybe we came because all our friends were coming. We heard them talking about salvation and justification. Or was it mystification and sanctification? Never really planned to get involved. Just wanted to see what all the excitement was about. Like spectators who join the parade, many of us came to watch, and then got involved.

So we can understand how the crowd grew when Jesus paraded into Jerusalem. People who were originally there for some other reason joined in the procession. There were pilgrims celebrating Passover, merchants traveling. Don't forget the farmers carrying their goods to market. We get a picture of an ordinary day on the road to Jerusalem. Most people were walking. Probably some people were herding sheep and lambs. Imagine the noise and confusion! Then along comes Jesus riding on a donkey. His disciples hail him as the messiah. Others on the road join in the cheers. No doubt there were even some jeers. Yet the whole procession swelled into a grand parade, marching into the city. People who came for entirely different reasons wound up parading into Jerusalem with Jesus.

The whole parade seemed to be spontaneous. Except we get little hints of a plan. You notice that the colt was tied where Jesus said it would be. Strangers led it away after saying the password, "The Lord has need of it." What was it the prophet Zechariah said, that the Messiah would enter the city humbly riding on a donkey? Something mysterious is afoot! Here's a grand parade taking

shape. The words of Psalm 118 echo through the crowd, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.” And everybody present understands what that means. In liturgical response they reply, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!” Just as the word of a particular float precedes it through the parade, so word of the messiah whisked through the crowd. Here he comes! Though it appears spontaneous, clearly God had it planned all along.

So the people hailed their king. Excitement filled the air. Here at last was the one to restore the fortunes of Jerusalem. No longer would they have to endure the humiliation of Roman occupation. Their long-ago dreams were being fulfilled. No longer would they feel the pain of abandonment. They expected Jesus to make Jerusalem like it was in the glory days. They wanted Jerusalem to be just like they had always imagined it to be. But Jesus had other plans. Jesus entered the city to open the gates to a new creation. And for that he would have to suffer and to die. Out of this week would come a new community, a healing community. But it would be different from one people had ever experienced before. Henri Nouwen said, “A Christian community is ... a healing community not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision.”¹

They didn’t know it at the time, but their new king was going to suffer and die. That message is difficult, but clear. Read it in Isaiah. Read it in Mark. Read it in Matthew. Read it in John. The pathway to new life, the new life as God intends, is a pathway through suffering and pain and death. Wounds and pains become the windows to a new tomorrow. No, that’s not the message we want to hear. Wealth, comfort and splendor are much more to our liking. But God calls us not to avoid, not to insulate ourselves from the pain and heartache of the world around us. God calls us as disciples of Christ, to enter into the world’s pain and suffering, to take it on our own shoulders, to bear it like a cross, so that the world may be healed. Jesus was the new king, anointed by God to rule over a new kingdom. But he wasn’t the king they expected. His kingdom was not of this world. It was of an entirely new world.

Everybody loves a parade. Spectators often join in. When they find out the parade’s purpose, they have to decide. Do they quit the parade? Or do they continue? Many of us joined Christ’s parade that way. At first, we didn’t really know what we were getting into. But now, we have a clearer picture. Following Jesus isn’t easy. But it is promising and worthwhile. Matter of fact, it’s worth a lifetime investment, for we are part of a new creation. Are you ready? Let’s take up the promise of a new life. Pick up your cross and join the parade.

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, (Garden city, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 96.