

(Mark 11:1-11 The Message)

When they were nearing Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany on Mount Olives, he sent off two of the disciples with instructions: "Go to the village across from you. As soon as you enter, you'll find a colt tethered, one that has never yet been ridden. Untie it and bring it. If anyone asks, 'What are you doing?' say, 'The Master needs him, and will return him right away.'"

They went and found a colt tied to a door at the street corner and untied it. Some of those standing there said, "What are you doing untying that colt?" The disciples replied exactly as Jesus had instructed them, and the people let them alone. They brought the colt to Jesus, spread their coats on it, and he mounted.

The people gave him a wonderful welcome, some throwing their coats on the street, others spreading out rushes they had cut in the fields. Running ahead and following after, they were calling out,

Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in God's name!

Blessed the coming kingdom of our father David!

Hosanna in highest heaven!

He entered Jerusalem, then entered the Temple. He looked around, taking it all in. But by now it was late, so he went back to Bethany with the Twelve.

## VIDEO

As you listened to the scriptures and watched that video you have got to be asking yourself: WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON? How can things change so fast?

I want to spend a few moments today trying to help us all figure out an answer to that question.

But before we do that --- let's take a little trip sideways.

Not too many weeks ago we got the Three G's of the Hollywood red carpet treatment.

Glitter. Glamour. Gossip.

If you tuned in February 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 81st Annual Academy Awards®, you got your fill of these "three G's" as celebrities walked the Red Carpet on their way into the Kodak Theatre. The E! Network began its coverage of the Oscars at noon, offering six hours of buildup to the arrival of the stars for the awards ceremony.

Thousands of fans, for whom following the lives of others is important, sat in specially

constructed stands to catch all the action. Thus, gawking and gossiping in the presence of glitter and glamour has now become an all-day event.

Why they did this is a mystery of interest only to tweedy professors of sociology and anthropology in the musty halls of the academy.

Flashbulbs popped and the paparazzi shot pics for the covers of People, Us and The National Enquirer. Interviewers stuck microphones into celebrity faces and asked stupid questions, to which they received mostly stupid answers. People actually enjoy this stuff?

Fact is, tons of fans get a thrill from watching their favorite stars on the Red Carpet, and the Academy Awards show has become the most-watched television event in the world, drawing nearly a billion viewers. A billion. About one in every six members of the human race is glued to the TV on Oscar night.

Glitter, glamour, gossip. Seems we just can't get enough.

Not that this is anything new. Think of today, Palm Sunday, as a sort of pre-show for Holy Week.

A superstar was coming to town:

so the people of Jerusalem spread their cloaks on the road (Luke 19:36).

The crowds waved branches of palm trees (John 12:13).

A major event was under way, a Passover Festival that could draw upwards of 2.5 million pilgrims to Jerusalem; you could say without too much exaggeration that the city was electrified with Oscar-night enthusiasm.

Jesus was aware of this, and knew exactly what he was getting into.

He expected a hero's welcome on Palm Sunday, but he also knew how this was all going to turn out. According to the Gospels he had been alluding to it for weeks, to the dismay of his disciples.

The gospel of Mark also tells us that Jesus and his disciples did all their own advance work. He sent two disciples ahead of him to acquire a colt, and said to them, "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it'". Just as Jesus predicted, the owners of the colt asked that very question, but they were silenced when the disciples explained, "The Lord needs it."

The point of Palm Sunday is that the Celebrity Christ is given the celebrity treatment as he enters Jerusalem. All the expected elements are in place:

- He makes a royal entrance, in a procession associated with powerful kings and conquering generals.
- He is escorted by the citizens of Jerusalem and "the whole multitude of the disciples". They wave palm branches, praise him for his deeds of power, and

sing hymns of acclamation, crying out, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven”.

- He rides on a colt, on the foal of a donkey, just as King Solomon did before his coronation — although Jesus’ choice of a donkey could also mean that he is a bringer of peace. If Jesus wanted a fight, he would have charged in on a stallion, a war horse, the first-century equivalent of a Hummer H2. Just as Pilate was doing as he entered the city from the opposite direction through the grand Jaffa Gate.

Face it, Jesus was a superstar, complete with the “three G’s” of glitter, glamour and gossip.

- He’s got the glitter of a royal entrance,
- the glamour of waving palm branches
- and even the gossip associated with his disciples and the borrowed colt.

There is a lot of buzz about this celebrity superstar as he enters the Holy City to pick up his prize.

But here’s the twist: His prize is a cross — and he knew it.

Like modern celebrities, Jesus is not only idolized, he is also picked apart.

On Sunday Jesus is feelin’ the love  
By Monday a sense of disappointment is beginning  
And by Friday he feels the rage.

The machinery that kills Jesus on Friday begins to operate on Sunday. As the disciples sing praises, the Pharisees begin to shout, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” But Jesus refuses to do this, replying, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out”.

From this point on, the chatter about Jesus becomes increasingly negative.

- People sense that he is not interested in driving out the oppressive Romans.
- They notice that he travels with a band of unarmed disciples, not a cell of terrorist operatives, as did Barabbas, for example.
- They hear him speak of coming wars and persecutions, not of glorious victories and times of prosperity.

The chief priests, scribes and leaders of the people start to look for a way to kill Jesus, and by the end of the week the people themselves are shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!”.

Mark tells us that the Roman governor can find no ground for the sentence of death, but the crowd keeps demanding that Jesus should be crucified. In the end, Pilate

grants them their wish.

Jesus is killed on Friday because he fails to live up to human fantasies. He gets picked apart like Costner on a good day; savaged like a starlet in a swan suit.

And let's face it: We tend to complain as well.

We live in a "What-Have-You-Done-For-Me-Lately?" sort of ethos.

We expect that even the slightest display of Christian religiosity gets us a pass to Easy Street. This is not the Jesus of the gospels who calls us to embrace our own cross, as he did his, and follow him.

Let's let Jesus be Jesus – not the superstar we want him to be. The message of this day of Palm Branches and Red Carpets is that Jesus Christ is Lord, not a La-La Land celebrity.

If you're ready to let Jesus step off the Red Carpet and simply be himself, be prepared for a life-changing lesson.

Jesus is not interested in glitter, glamour and gossip, but he is interested in grace, giving and goodness.

We are saved "by grace".

It is his charis that makes it possible for us to live in a "state of grace." We are children of grace, and but for that grace, only God knows where we'd be.

He was all about giving.

He gave of himself.

He who was rich became poor that we might be rich.

He gave until there was no more to give.

He was all about goodness.

The essential goodness of Jesus, unparalleled by anyone before him or after him, testifies to the life to which we are called. When he saw the crowds as sheep not having a shepherd, he was moved with compassion — he became almost physically sick, so great was his love.

Let's give Jesus the palm branch treatment, but let's not make this a one Sunday wonder. His grace, his giving and his goodness compel us to change our behavior, not just pat him on the back, or complain behind his back.