

False Peak Challenges

(Communion Message)

Mark 11:1-11

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When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna!

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.



So I am climbing up the mountain. I am tired, real tired. I wonder to myself, how much further is it to the top? And then I come up over a rock face and I see the top. Ah, what a feeling! Hallelujah! And then, a few minutes later, I realize I was wrong. The summit is still far off. I am at a false peak. And so I walk on.

This experience comes to my mind as I read again the familiar story of Jesus entering into Jerusalem on that last week of his life. It was a false peak. It was not false for Jesus. I do believe he had a real sense of what was going on for him. But it was a false peak for the crowd and even for those who had traveled with Jesus and knew him best.

What was false about it? Certainly not the hope of deliverance! The people were ready for that. In our hearts, we all want to be free. No, that was real. But what kind of freedom would it be? Would it be the kind that is characterized so well in the book *Animal Farm* by George Orwell? You remember that story, don't you, of how the

animals took over the farm from the humans, and how the pigs manipulated the other animals through lies and brainwashing until, at the end, when the pigs and the humans were negotiating with each other and the other animals were watching through the window of the farmhouse? Orwell writes at the end of the book: "No question now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which."

A false peak. Why? Because the situation belied a deeper truth. Something else was going on, something not yet clear, yet to be unveiled. In the case of Palm Sunday, that deeper truth, that real summit, would be the gospel message: God's love is revealed in the act of self-giving, not in the changing of who is in the dominating position. This deep truth, this deepest truth, would be revealed in the victory of the resurrection: death and violence and oppression are vanquished by love.

In their book, *The Last Week*, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan write about Palm Sunday. They say, "Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30. . . One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers. . . On the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor . . . entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers. Jesus's procession proclaimed the Kingdom of God; Pilate's proclaimed the power of empire. The two processions embody the central conflict of the week that led to Jesus's crucifixion." (Page 2)

But the gospel is not as simple as choosing one team or the other, one being absolutely right and the other absolutely wrong. That is the false peak we need to guard against. The deeper truth, the real summit is that God's love comes for all people, poor and rich, oppressed and oppressor, slave and free, men and women, gay, and straight, and bi-sexual and transgendered.

The hosannas that were raised on Palm Sunday would become lost as the week went on, as people realized the consequence of their allegiance to the way of life Jesus announced. Perhaps some of the same people who cried "Hosanna" on Sunday cried "crucify him" on Friday. It is important for us to see ourselves, our human culpability and nature in that situation. What might we have done? Can we say we are above the possibility of betrayal or desertion? I believe we cannot. It would be another false peak.

But it would be false, also, to condemn ourselves, to keep ourselves from accepting the love that comes to those who have done wrong, made mistakes, gone the wrong way, withheld love, gone along with the crowd that is entranced by power and fearful of sacrifice. So in that sense, singing the Hosannas is the right and true thing to do. Especially for us who have the whole story, the whole gospel, who have been to the mountain and seen the victory God has achieved for all creation. Thanks be to God.

Amen.