

“Sun Rays through the Clouds”  
Mark 11:1-11

According to Eric Berne’s theory in his 1964 book, *Games People Play: the Basic Handbook of Transactional Analysis*, as human beings we are often playing our life’s “scripts” which are formed between ages 5 and 7. A five-year-old, largely unconsciously, watches the “players” on the “stage” of his or her young life speak their “lines” and notices the “stage directions.” There is dialogue, plot, and drama. This child begins to discern the script of this play, with its recurring themes, patterns and outcomes. Later, the child begins to learn his or her “part,” what “lines” he or she is to speak and what “stage directions” to follow. The child becomes an increasingly good actor and less and less an authentic person. Decades go by and the child grows into adulthood, but continues to behave as a producer-director, recruiting players, assigning roles, and directing outcomes, all to replicate and perpetuate the “script” learned years before. Some follow the script of being the achiever in the family, the clown, the parent or controller, the trouble maker, the needy one, or the unpredictable one and so on. Unfortunately, most of life is lived this way until we decide to wake up/grow up and be conscious about who we really are.

The same was happening with Jesus’ life and his entry into Jerusalem. He was supposed to enter and play the script of a military leader that would revolt against the elite in Jerusalem and in Rome. We tend to miss a lot of this because to us Jesus is the hero and we celebrate every year this entry into Jerusalem and call it triumphant. But if we pay attention to the context, we realize many things. 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 discover is that Jesus’ entry was not triumphant. This was certainly the expectation of the people who were welcoming Jesus. 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 had delivered Jerusalem from the Seleucids (Greek Empire). 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 palm became a symbol of the Jews’ desire for deliverance. Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, also had an account of another leader, Menahem, Leader of Sicarius, (a few years after Jesus) who during the first months of the revolt, led a kingly procession into Jerusalem. Mark’s narrative of Jesus’ march on Jerusalem, composed only a few years after Menahem’s procession, shows a politically loaded parallel to Jesus’ entry. So, the stage was set for Jesus to play by the rules and expectations of his people. 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. In his book, *Binding the Strong Man*, biblical scholar Ched Myers notes that, “Although this text also belongs to the liberation-of-Jerusalem tradition, it is expressly antimilitary in its tone. Jesus does not intend to fight for the temple, and the Mount of Olives will in fact be used for the purpose of judgment. (13:3)...From this perspective, the theatrics of the procession may have been meant by Mark as a kind of parody, contrasting Jesus’ destiny of the cross with the popular messianic expectations of the disciples/crowds/readers.” Even the symbolism of the branches is important because it signifies that Jesus was not welcomed by the elite urban powers of Jerusalem. He was welcomed by the peasants, those who were oppressed by the powers.

So in the midst of all of these social and national expectations, Jesus was writing his own unique script. He rode on a colt to show that he was not going to follow the “stage directions.” Jesus was certainly coming to liberate and to save, but he was not going to do it in ways that promote the same cycles of violence and oppression. This is how the Spirit of God works in our world, not according to predictable scripts of learned behaviors and patterns, but in the newness and uniqueness of each life, each culture and each people. This is similar to seeing sun rays coming through the clouds. There are moments of great clarity in our lives and in our world when we are able to focus on what is real and important, instead of following along a set of predictable roles.

So, the invitation of this Palm Sunday is not to just wave our palms and sing our Hosannas because that is what is expected of us on this Sunday in the Christian calendar. The invitation is to get some clarity about how we are living our faith. What script are you living? Are the expectations of society and the roles that have been set for you flexible enough that you are able to be the unique person God has created you to be? Are you able to see God’s unique presence in your life? What scripts are we living even as a nation? Are we able to confront the oppressive powers in our world without falling into the trap of promoting violence, greed and oppression?

The parade on the way to Jerusalem served as an awakening sign to turn the world upside down. The journey of the cross ultimately leads us to liberation from the old and worn out “scripts” of our lives. Certain scripts of oppression and exploitation still persist today—Darfur, Palestine, Zimbabwe, to name a few. These are places where those who are poor and vulnerable need salvation. Even in the U.S., systems and structures are in place that keep certain people struggling just to make ends meet. We are very aware of the corruption that exists even in our country. As God’s people, how can we participate in God’s saving acts of love? What might God ask us to do on behalf of those who plead, “Hosanna! Save us!” What sort of self-emptying might God be calling us to? Is your relationship with God helping you to stop and examine the “scripts” of your life that deprive you and others from living an authentic life of love and service?

A Franciscan Benediction expresses this beautifully:

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain in to joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

With the economic crisis our world/country is facing, there is an opportunity for us to get unstuck from our “normal” scripts in the way we deal with our economy. We are able to question the old assumptions about an economy where survival of the fittest is the way to go and where consumers spend beyond their means to stimulate the economy. People are questioning such assumptions.

Here is a story about someone who did not play by the rules and was able to see another person as a real person: Julio Diaz lives in the Bronx, a suburb of New York City. Each night, the 31-year-old social worker takes an hour-long subway ride home. He usually gets off one

stop early to eat at his favorite diner. One night last February, Diaz stepped out onto the train platform and encountered a young man in his teens who emerged from the shadows and pulled a knife on him. Diaz recalls, "He wanted my money, so I just gave him my wallet and told him, 'Here you go.'" As the boy started to walk off, Diaz said, "Hey, wait a minute. You forgot something. If you're going to be robbing people for the rest of the night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm." The boy said, "Like what's going on here?" and asked Diaz, "Why are you doing this?" Diaz replied: "If you're willing to risk your freedom for a few dollars, then I guess you must really need the money. I mean, all I wanted to do was get dinner and if you really want to join me...hey, you're more than welcome. Diaz talked the boy into going with him to the diner and they sat in a booth. When the bill arrived, Diaz said to the boy, "Look, I guess you're going to have to pay for this bill 'cause you have my money and I can't pay for this. So if you give me my wallet back, I'll gladly treat you." The boy "didn't even think about it" and returned the wallet, Diaz says. "I gave him \$20...figure maybe it'll help him. I don't know." Afterward Diaz asked for something in return – the teen's knife – "and he gave it to me."

Jesus did not play by the rules of his day, not because he was a law-breaker, but because he didn't buy into the old scripts of power and control. He abided fully in the Spirit of God, the Spirit of love and gentleness that led him only to give love. May we be inspired by the same Spirit as we journey on with Jesus to cross where he confronted those scripts of violence and oppression and transform them into life. Amen.