

Jesus Didn't Do It
Mark 1:1-11
Colebrook Congregational Church
March 29, 2015 – Palm Sunday

When I was in seventh grade, way back when Vogel-Wetmore was Torrington's junior high school, the music appreciation and chorus teacher, was an energetic woman named Doreen Page. Her conducting style was very much like that of Whoopi Goldberg's fake nun character in the Sister Act movies. I remember one concert she had both hands waving around at the sopranos and altos, and then used her foot to cue the tenors. Anyway, during one of her classes on the differences between musical and operas, she showed us the 1972 movie musical version of the opera Jesus Christ Superstar. She made a big deal about the editing of a certain scene, so much so that whenever Palm Sunday comes around, I think of that scene. Any movie adaptation has to make some artistic changes going from page to screen, and while we know in the Bible that Jesus is aware of what is going to happen to him once he gets into Jerusalem long before this point, the movie changes that moment of realization to this scene, where the crowd of people are swinging palms and singing Hosana, and when their song gets to a verse where they ask if He would die for them, the video freezes on Jesus' face with his expression of realization, while the sound continues with the song.

Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem was frightening to the authorities in Jerusalem. To the Sanhedrin religious court, to the Roman-approved King of Judea, and to the Roman Prefect governing the province. The reason for this comes from all the symbolism in everything Jesus did, but then ends with something Jesus didn't do.

The account of Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem is repeated in all four Gospels, with only little differences between them, and for once, Mark's version is not the shortest, but John's version, which is a bit of a reversal of the norm!

Jesus starts off the chapter on his way to Jerusalem, stopping in Bethany near the Mount of Olives, which is within a day's walk from the city. The fourteenth chapter of the Book of Zechariah prophesicizes that a future king will ride into Jerusalem, starting that journey from the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus sent his disciples into the village to find a colt of a donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem. The ninth chapter of Zechariah also prophesizes that the future king will ride upon a colt of a donkey.

In ancient times, what a king chose to ride symbolized his intentions. Horses represented war, and kings rode them if their intention was to fight. The donkey was considered an animal of peace, so kings rode them to let people know that they came in peace.

So, right off the bat, before Jesus even gets close to Jerusalem, he is fulfilling prophecy and is also reassuring people that he comes in peace. And the roads would have been full of people heading to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover, so he would have been seen by many.

Once he gets closer to Jerusalem, he attracts more crowds, and they spread cloaks and leafy branches, or “rushes” on the road before Jesus. It is John's account that specifies that the leafy branches were palms, while the other three use the more vague word, which refer to a flower. In the Ancient Near East, it was customary to cover the path of someone in some way that you wanted to give the highest honor. Using the rushes got the path covered and since it was a flowering plant, it probably looked pretty as well! And as it turns out, the churches in India, on Palm Sunday, use both palms and marigolds in their processions and celebrations. The palms themselves are also symbolic. In Judaism, they are used in the Feast of the Tabernacles as a symbol of rejoicing, and among the Greeks and Romans as a symbol of victory and were used in triumphal marches.

To an observer in Jerusalem, with all the symbols, Jesus is like a royal on an animal of peace being given the highest honors riding into Jerusalem in triumph. The crowd is singing Psalm 118, and they have to have been completely worked up. If this was any other story, you might expect that the scene ends with the rider being crowned and set up on a throne to begin ruling. However, the account in Mark ends abruptly without the expected coronation. Jesus didn't do it. Jesus just went to the Temple, checked it out, then went on his way. He could have seized power right then, but he didn't. He showed restraint. That's not what he was there for. Jesus has a bigger

purpose, at a cosmic scale, that made the mere kingship of a small province seem trivial.

We find out in later passages that the authorities were completely frightened by this scene. The Sanhedrin uses this scene against Jesus when they arrest him later. The Romans keep more legions than usual in the area, because the Judeans tended to revolt...a lot, so they wanted to do away with anything that could challenge their authority or spark ANOTHER rebellion. Any person who could sway the people like how Jesus did, was seen as a dangerous person that had to be dealt with. Even though Jesus didn't do what they were afraid he was going to do, they still felt the need to act against Jesus.

As many of you know, I am involved in an artistic movement called steampunk. One of the largest festivals of this artform used to be held annually in Waltham, MA, sponsored by the Charles River Museum, with monthly socials held to supplement the festival. The former curator there was one of my best customers...mainly because her daughter kept accidentally breaking things that I made, and when she ran out of ideas for programs for the monthly events, she asked that my company take over the planning and executing of programs. Theresa and I did so, and greatly increased the attendance and participation.

When the Curator's daughter graduated high school, they moved to Florida, and the new curator did not like steampunk, and ended all the programs, leaving us out in the cold. Theresa had already left for Arizona, so the group looked to me to see if I would continue the monthly socials. There was a vacuum, and I decided that I could not let the programs just end.

Many of my friends and fellow group members assumed that I would rule the programs by fiat now. That I would dictate where, what, and when. I had one friend who wanted me to move everything to Salem so she wouldn't have far to drive. I had others from the artist's consortium pushing for moving them closer to them south to Norwich or Warwick. I was lobbied by gamers from New Hampshire to move them farther north.

I made one decision by fiat. That the program would not be taken over by

any one special interest, but would address the needs of all those in New England. I decided to run things like a Congregational Church. I called together everyone involved and together we decided what would become of us collectively and either voted or reached consensus. We decided to spend a year moving around New England, letting each interest group host the program in turn. Now we are mostly settled in Worcester, the geographical center of New England. I remember one conversation during the planning of a New Hampshire-hosted program. My friend said to me, "...your program." I stopped him and said, "No, it's not my program, it's ours. All of us in New England, it's ours, together."

That's how I used my influence. To move the scattered and provincial-minded groups into seeing themselves as part of something greater, especially when we can come together, and work together, and move forward together. I remembered what Jesus did not do, and used it as an example of what I shouldn't do in my own situation. I made sure to act for the benefit of the whole group, and not myself.

Jesus was expected to seize power when he entered Jerusalem as a triumphant king in peace. But instead, of seeking personal power, Jesus continued on to serve humanity, making sure that all of us are saved through his personal sacrifice. While the phrase "What Would Jesus Do" is commonly used, we should also never forget What Jesus Didn't Do.

Prayers of the People

[PAUSE]

Loving God, as we find ourselves in this season that brings together joys and sacrifices, we look towards the fulfillment of God's promises beyond the brokenness and neediness of this life. We offer thanksgiving for God's presence with us and also petitions for the transformation of the church and the world. We pray for all in the world who need you; for healing, for comfort, for safety and security. We pray for the courage to be your messengers of your Good News by providing for the needs of our neighbors. We pray for those who serve us, in our community and abroad, keeping us safe and seeing to our needs. We pray for caregivers, guide their hands and hearts to accomplish great deeds in the service of others. We pray for your guidance, lead us & help us to make the right decisions in our lives. We also ask that you remember those who we keep in our hearts, especially:

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

O God, Our Life-creator, Pain-bearer, Love-inspirer, day by day you sustain the weary with your word and gently encourage us to place our trust in you. Awaken us to the suffering of those around us; save us from hiding in denials or taunts that deepen the hurt; give us grace to share one another's burdens in humble service for you. Amen.