

**Déjà vu Palm Sunday**      **Mark 11:1-11** (English Standard Version)  
**Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV**   **Palm Sunday (April 1, 2012)**

<sup>1</sup> Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" <sup>4</sup> And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. <sup>5</sup> And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup> And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. <sup>7</sup> And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. <sup>9</sup> And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>11</sup> And 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.

Today is our last Sunday for the door standing in the sanctuary. Today, our confirmands have come through that door, signifying their coming into the Church in a new way. Today they **enter the sanctuary as confirmands** and **will leave as members**.

Five banners have adorned that door, each for two weeks, as we focused on what each one said, what each one means to us.

- ✦ These are the five vows of membership,
- ✦ The five elements of what it means to walk as a child of God in the Kingdom of God.
- ✦ These are our five promises of how we will respond to the incredible gifts that God has given us.
- ✦ These are the five things that each member promises – not to keep the church going, but to continue our growth as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- ✦ These are the five life patterns that move us from being mere admirers of Jesus to becoming disciples of Jesus.

**Today, we look at what it means FOR US to be a WITNESS to the events of Palm Sunday.**

As I danced with the Gospel text read earlier, and how it got played out in the Holy Week that followed (as we sang about in our Hymn of Dedication) I got to wondering about the donkey thing: **"How did Jesus know about the donkey, its**

location, the questioning bystanders, the answer that would make it all right with them for Jesus' disciples to 'liberate' the donkey?"

- ⌘ Did Jesus send someone ahead to make these plans, and to arrange for the passwords?
- ⌘ Did Jesus have the power to see into the future?
- ⌘ Did Jesus have the power of mental telepathy to make these things happen the way He said they would?

I was still chewing on these possibilities when I began reading a book "**The Dogs of Riga,**" by Manning Henkel. "The Dogs of Riga" is the second in the series of books about Swedish detective Kurt Wallender, who lives and works in the town of Ystad, Sweden. In this book, he travels from Ystad to Riga, Latvia, to investigate the murder of Latvian police officer Major Liepa. As the investigation unfolds, Kurt is introduced to the murdered police officer's widow, Baida Liepa.

**Baida Liepa?** All of a sudden the **bells go off in my head**. You see, this was the second in a series of several books I've read, including the very last one "The Troubled Man." **(I haven't read them in order.)** Baida Liepa has been mentioned as a character or as a memory in almost every other Kurt Wallender book. And, now as I read in Book Number 2 of their introduction, I know that Kurt and Laida are going to fall in love. I know that after their international courtship extends over the course of several years, he will finally propose to Baida Liepa, and I know that she will turn him down. And I also know that, in the end, Baida Liepa will get cancer, come to Ystad one last time to say good-bye to Kurt before she dies, and that he will end up (after increasingly frequent episodes of what he describes as being in a fog) being diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. This last bit of information I found out in the final paragraph on the final page of the final chapter of the **final book – in 2011**.

So, when I read this week of Kurt Wallender meeting this woman in 1981, I know how it's all going to end. Indeed, I'm guessing that when he wrote this 1981 book, **even author Henning Mankel did not know what I knew this week as I read it**; he

probably didn't know back in 1981 that in 2011 Baida would get cancer and Kurt would get Alzheimer's. The author didn't know when he wrote it, but I do as I read it.

And it occurred to me that **while maybe not the answer to my questions of Jesus and the Donkey Caper, that as I felt the emotions in this moment of foreseeing through 30 years of future events of Kurt Wallender and Baida Liepa, PERHAPS I had a glimmer of how Jesus FELT on that day.**

In fact, for this whole past week, I have awakened every morning with a question on my mind: "I WONDER HOW JESUS FELT ON THE TUESDAY BEFORE PALM SUNDAY, knowing what He did?"

"I WONDER HOW JESUS FELT ON THE WEDNESDAY BEFORE PALM SUNDAY, knowing what He did?"

"I WONDER HOW JESUS FELT ON THE THURSDAY BEFORE PALM SUNDAY, knowing what He did?"

**He didn't just know about the donkey. He knew more.**

And yet – He kept on coming; kept on doing.

In Psalm 118, that we used for our Call to Worship, we are reminded –at the BEGINNING and at the END and (particularly when we read the whole psalm) SEVERAL PLACES IN BETWEEN: of one central, dominating, controlling fact: **O give thanks to the Lord, for HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.**

FROM THE CREATION all the way through Palm Sunday's Hosannas through Thursday's Garden of Gethsemane and the pain and torture of Good Friday (INCLUDING THE DESERTION OF HIS DISCIPLES), **O give thanks to the Lord, for HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.**

God takes the pain of it all and, in Jesus, turns reJECTION into reDEMPtion.

God knows **how we respond**, and keeps on loving us anyhow.

**Like a great chess master** who takes whatever moves we make and turns them into a sure conclusion of victory, so, too **God writes STRAIGHT with the CROOKED LINES that we humans draw.**

Because it is what I must do to keep up with the life of the congregation, I read Facebook with daily frequency. Early this past week, one of our Saint Markers wrote: that she **"was pleased to see WVU win the Orange Bowl....again."**

So when saw Clemson Tiger Andre Ellington cut through WVU's defense like a hot knife through butter and scamper 68 yards for a touchdown, and then saw Clemson Tiger QB Tajh Boyd throw a 27 yard touchdown pass to freshman wunderkind Sammy Watkins, taking a 17-14 lead into the second quarter – she did not have to worry at all.

Not even a bit. Because even though it had not yet come up on the television screen this time, she knew that WVU defender Darwin Cook would make that 99 yard fumble recovery for a touchdown and break Clemson's back. Even though it seemed in the first quarter of watching that WVU would have their hands full, she knew that Geno Smith would set a college bowl record of six touchdown passes, would **surpass Tom Brady's passing statistics in the Orange Bowl**, and would end up routing the Clemson Tigers by a 70-33 score, setting a NCAA bowl game points record.

**If, on December 31, 2011, you knew what you know now, how many of you would have bet money on Clemson in the Orange Bowl? It would be just plain crazy, knowing what we know now, right?!**

If the disciples knew on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday what they would learn later on Easter, do you think they would have cut and run and have deserted Jesus the way they did? **It would be just plain crazy, knowing what we know now, right?!**

**And yet – yet, all these years later**, ONLY about **25%** of the people who shout "Hosanna" [on Palm Sunday 2012] and "Hallelujah" [on Easter Sunday 2012] will come out to worship God on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday.

**It seems just plain crazy, knowing what we know now, right?!**

I just wonder what that tells us about our **FAITH** or about our **BRAINS**.

**Knowing clear back then how those who claim the Name Christian will continue to treat Him during Holy Week nearly 2,000 years later – not much advancement over those **early disciples who at least at the excuse of being afraid****

**and not knowing the result** – I continue to wonder what Jesus must have been thinking on the Thursday before Palm Sunday, the Friday before Palm Sunday, etc.

Sometimes I wonder if Jesus ever feels like **Phil Connors** (Bill Murray's character) in the movie **Groudhog Day** – wondering how many times it has to be repeated before it finally gets done right.

**What does this say about us? I still haven't figured out the answer to that one.**

What does that tell us about God's steadfast love?

**O give thanks to the Lord, for HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.**

I give thanks. But I'm not sure that I can comprehend **HOW God still loves us as much as that. Oh, how He loves you and me ...**

But, as I said at the beginning of today's sermon: **Today, we ask ourselves what it means FOR US to be a WITNESS to the events of Palm Sunday.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.