

**Date:** March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015 (Palm Sunday)

**Text:** Mark 11:1-11 and Mark 15:6-15

**Series/Focus:** *People of the Passion/The Follower*

**Preacher:** Student Assistant Nathan Loersch

This morning we are going to look at 2 portions of God's Word, and the first is from Mark 11—the story of the very first “Palm Sunday.”

**As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’ ”**

**<sup>4</sup> They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup> some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” <sup>6</sup> They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. <sup>7</sup> When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “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 heaven!”**

**<sup>11</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.**

What an amazing scene—hundreds, perhaps thousands of people lining the way for Jesus to enter Jerusalem, praising him to high heaven! But now—Mark 15, which happens just 5 days later, on Friday.

**<sup>6</sup> Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. <sup>7</sup> A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. <sup>8</sup> The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.**

**<sup>9</sup> “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, <sup>10</sup> knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. <sup>12</sup> “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. <sup>13</sup> “Crucify him!” they shouted.**

**<sup>14</sup> “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” <sup>15</sup> Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.**

You hear these two stories and you might be dumbfounded. People were streaming into Jerusalem from all over the known world to celebrate the Passover, and they laid branches down on the road and took the cloaks off their backs and laid them down on the dusty road in reverence of a man riding on a donkey, and they shouted the praise word, “Hosanna!” and then only 5 days later, they shouted “Crucify Him, Crucify Him!” What Happened?

How could the public opinion of Jesus change so drastically in people in the space of 5 days? After seeing what happened on Sunday, you would never expect to see what happened on Friday. Just unbelievable.

2 days ago a 5-year-old boy named Seth Lane had the second bone marrow transplant operation of his young life. Prior to the operation, there was a video of him posted online in which he held up signs saying that he loved yellow and asking if people could wear yellow on the day of his surgery to support him. What happened on Friday was remarkable. People from all over the world—Australia, Italy, Ireland, Boston, New York, Chicago, and many other places posted pictures or short videos of themselves wearing yellow and wishing him the best. People from all over the world came together in support of young Seth Lane.

Could you imagine if 5 days after the surgery, those same people posted videos saying they hoped Seth's surgery failed and that he would die as soon as possible? That's incredibly painful even to think about. It seems preposterous. Ridiculous. Unimaginable. But that's exactly how people treated Jesus.

Why did they turn on Jesus so suddenly? Was it because they finally realized how terrible of a criminal Jesus was—finally remembered all the terrible things Jesus had done? No. He had only done wonderfully *good* things. The answer? Mark 15:11 – <sup>11</sup>**But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.**

The Jewish people were *followers*. And instead of following Jesus, they followed the chief priests. The religious leaders, who were very persuasive. They were powerful and important people! If you were to go against them, you might be risking imprisonment or even worse punishment. And so when these powerful men passed the message through the crowds, "Choose Barabbas! Crucify Jesus!" The people went with the flow.

And when you think about it, what the people did doesn't seem so crazy. If you were at a huge event with crowds of people—say Summerfest—and policemen and state troopers were going through the crowd barking instructions while wearing threatening looks on their faces—you'd probably listen to them. Doing what they asked, even if you didn't agree with it, would be the easiest thing to do.

It was easier for the Jewish people to do what the religious leaders told them, even though they probably disagreed. It was the safer choice. They followed down the wrong path. And it is easy for us to do the same.

It's much easier to go along with a crude or unclean joke or one that drags someone else's name through the mud than to stand up for what is right, at risk of being ridiculed yourself.

When someone gets angry at you and calls you names, it is much easier to name-call right back. When someone treats you terribly or betrays you by going behind your back, it's much easier to publicly speak badly about them rather than forgive them in love.

When you're tempted to have sex outside of marriage or get drunk or drink underage because "Everyone's doing it—it's normal!" ...it's a lot easier to give in and follow in sin than resist temptation.

And when we realize that we have each followed the Tempter himself down the dark road of sin, we don't just look at the Jewish people's actions and say, "What happened?" We ask that question about our own life, and we find we are no different than those Jews. We sin just like they did—by following the easier path.

Thank God that Jesus did not follow what would have been the much easier path—to avoid suffering, avoid humiliation, avoid death...after all, he didn't have to do any of those things, did he? While he was on trial and all the way until he died, he had plenty of chances to get out of

suffering. Pilate asked him if he was the king of the Jews—he could have said no. The religious leaders asked him if he was the Christ. If he had said no, he wouldn't have gone through the whole ordeal of a late-night kangaroo court and execution. When people jeered at him, "If you're the Son of God, come down from the cross!" He could've! And it would have been easy!

He could've done any of those things. But he didn't. Jesus followed the path of suffering and death, because he wanted to pay for the sins of the Jews who condemned him, and he wanted to pay for your sins. And he did! Jesus followed the path of betrayal, suffering, humiliation, death, and being separated from God his Father, because he wanted to save you from the times you don't follow him. And he did! And that is the best news in the world.

This week is generally called "Holy Week." Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, finally...Easter Sunday. Perhaps my favorite week of the entire year. It's the basis of Christianity—Jesus' death and resurrection. But even this week, the devil will try to get you to follow him down the path of sin. Fight against him by staying firmly rooted in God's Word. In your worship folder, there are a couple of tools to help you do that—on page 6 in the "My Next Steps" box there is a suggestion for daily Bible reading for this week, following along with the life of Jesus. On page 8 there are all the area services listed for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Fight against the devil by meeting God in his Word both at home and in church this week. And we'll see you back here next Sunday on Easter to celebrate the fact that Jesus not only died to take away your sins, but he rose to give you eternal life! Amen.