

Why Are You Doing This?

Mark 11:1-10

What are you doing? Why are you doing this? If you're a parent, you get used to asking your kids questions like we heard in today's Gospel lesson. Why are you doing this? Why are you doing that? Sometimes there's an innocent explanation to why they're drawing on the walls. Other times, they can't explain why the sink is overflowing and there's soap all over the bathroom.

As we celebrate Palm Sunday and look into Holy Week, we see the culmination of Jesus' life and ministry. And we see that the misunderstandings that have characterized everything that came before are still present. Jesus has been dealing with misunderstandings about who he is and what he came to do throughout his ministry. Crowds flocked to him to be healed or fed, but went away once he started saying stranger, crazier things. Even Peter, right after confessing that Jesus was the Messiah, misunderstands what the Messiah would do and tells Jesus that he will never be arrested or killed.

Jesus prepares his disciples to answer the questions they would get as they follow his command. "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. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" Jesus warns the disciples that they might be questioned when they go to borrow the donkey.

What must it have been like to run this particular errand for Jesus? Is Jesus really telling two of his followers to run ahead into the town, steal a donkey, and bring it back? Of course, Jesus clarifies by instructing them that

if anyone asks about it, just say that Jesus said to do it, but they will bring it back soon.

That's not the only time that question will be asked this week. The chief priests and Pharisees ask that question of Jesus, "Why are you doing this?" They see the spectacle of the triumphal entry and wonder why Jesus is upsetting the status quo.

As the week goes on, more and more people will ask that question. Peter will ask Jesus why are you doing this as he washes his disciples' feet. Jesus prays in the Garden, asking why his Father's will is for him to die, and then asks his disciples why they couldn't stay awake one hour to pray with him. Jesus asks the guards why they come to arrest him in the garden. When Jesus is brought before Pilate, the Roman governor wonders why his man has been brought before him. He wonders why the crowd asks for Jesus' death while demanding the release of Barabbas, a notorious criminal and terrorist.

The crowd that gathered to wave their palms and cheer had a bit of understanding, might have been able to give a partial answer to why they were doing that. They had hopes that Jesus was king, that his lordship was good, that his rule should be desired. The palm branches they waved were a symbol of political liberation. The crowd hoped that Jesus would be the king who would save them, expelling the occupying romans and ending their oppression.

Jesus comes riding a donkey, a symbol of peace, not of military might. Jesus did talk about providing for their needs, about making people whole, to give them a full life. But the people were caught up in their own wish

fulfillment fantasies and not paying attention to what Jesus' actions and words told them about what was really going on.

That leads to the sharp change in the crowds' tone and message. Those unrealized expectations, those hopes that they fear will remain unfulfilled. The crowd cheers for Jesus, they wave palm branches and sing, "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." However, all these victorious chants were fickle because in only a few short days, such chants will cease when they shout, "Crucify Him!"

That leads to the most important person to whom we need to ask the question. Why are you doing this, Jesus? Why are you going through all of this suffering, all of this pain? Why are you doing this for this crowd that turns on you, for these disciples that flee from you, betray you, deny you? Why are you doing this?

Why? I'm doing this for you, Jesus answers. I'm doing this because I love you. I'm doing this because this is what needs to be done to save you. That's why Jesus did it.

And that's why we're doing this, coming together to remember the events of this week. We come together to be reminded of the punishment our sins deserve. We will witness our Lord instituting His Supper and washing his disciples' feet, battling Satan in the Garden of Gethsemane in prayer, and being betrayed by Judas. We will also witness Good Friday and Christ's suffering and Passion. But remember why Jesus does it all: out of love for you.

What are you doing? Why are you doing this? Why are you here? Why did you choose to come to church today, when so many people didn't make that choice? Why are you here?

Out of a sense of nostalgia, hoping for some blessing, praying to do well on that exam or project coming up? Fifty-eight percent of Iowans attend religious services less than once a year, and only 23% attend weekly or more.

How many times in our lives do we do things that we do not fully understand but feel convicted to do? How many times have we done things because Jesus has commanded it, but it looks like foolishness to others. Love our enemies? Nonsense. Give away our hard-earned money to the poor? Foolishness! We may not be stealing a donkey for Jesus, but we do things because Jesus has told us to, and these commands do indeed have a larger purpose, even if they look like foolishness to the world.

Rev. Glenn F. Merritt, former director of Disaster Response for the LCMS, said "Lutherans assisting with relief and recovery efforts are often asked, 'Why are you doing this? The door then is open for the sharing of the Gospel.'"

Why are you doing this? Because of what Jesus went through for us, we are here. We hear the stories. We're reminded of our sin and our need for a savior. And we're reminded of our savior, of all that Jesus did for us. That's why we're doing this. I think that's a good reason.

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