

Reading Mark 11:1-11.

Introduction

Good morning everyone, this is now the 3rd Sunday we do not have a service in church, but I hope that you have found the way to our Zoom services or other alternative means of worship.

I personally found this week quite hard – still recovering in energy from the flu I had last week, but also finding it hard to concentrate and motivate myself. However, I had time to read a bit more from the book I am studying: Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes, by Kenneth Bailey. Unfortunately, this book does not cover the passage what we read today: Jesus entering Jerusalem on a Donkey and the people welcoming him as King.

Situation

But reading this book and having been to Jerusalem only in February, helps me to picture these scenes differently. One thing that struck me is the area that is being spoken about is so compact. We could walk from our Guest house, which is on the site of Herod's Palace on the west side of the old city to the

Garden of Gethsemane on the east side of the city and the temple in about half an hour.

Jesus approached Jerusalem from the east and passes through Bethphage and Bethany, both on the east side of the Mount of Olives, and he would have come into Jerusalem through the eastern Gate, which Christians call the Golden Gate.

In Jewish tradition the Divine Presence enters the temple from the East and in Ezekiel 44:1-3 the Messiah enters into Jerusalem via the east gate.

44 Then the man brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one facing east, and it was shut. 2 The Lord said to me, "This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered through it. 3 The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the Lord. He is to enter by way of the portico of the gateway and go out the same way."

The Gate is shut now since the Middle Ages and still enforced shut by the Israeli police today for protection against terrorists,

but in Jesus' time it was open, and tradition has it that Jesus entered Jerusalem and the Temple at the same time through this gate. Although the gospels don't detail this.

It this was the case though, it would be another sign that Jesus at this time claims to be the Messiah. He came from the east, entered Jerusalem and the Temple through the East Gate, which is the Gate that the Messiah is to come through, and he rides a colt, which the animal for a King to ride on. Although Jesus does state it, the symbols that he employs point to him being the Messiah.

And the crowd picks up on the symbols, spreading their cloaks and branches ahead of him on road, and shouting Hosanna ("Safe"). In their praise they refer to Ps 118:26:

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And they extend it to refer to Jesus as bring the Kingdom of our father David.

The symbolism is clear: Jesus is the Messiah, and he is the King.

However, the passage ends with a bit of an anticlimax... after entering Jerusalem and the Temple in this way, Jesus just looks around and then leaves to go back to Bethany to stay the night.

Leaving the crowd, but also us as readers, with the question. If he is the Messiah... what kind of Messiah is he?

The Jewish people were desperate to be liberated from the Roman Empire... and their Messiah was the one to 'Make Israel Great again'. But that is not the role that Jesus is playing... No, he is not wanting people to be freed from the Romans, but wants them to be focused on God via him. The Gospel of Mark starts with Jesus saying: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"(Mark 1:15).

Jesus battle is not one of Kingdoms, Empires and Nations. Not then and not now. Jesus' battle is the one for our hearts, our allegiance. He is our King and our Messiah. But unlike human kings or governments his rule over our heart is not a given. As a Dutch national my human king is Koning Willem. But as I reside in the UK I have to conform to UK law and practices.

However, I have to choose, on a daily, hourly, every minute of my life that Jesus is my King. He died for me, he gave everything for me. He is my King, but I have to acknowledge him in my heart

There are many other things, people, forces and spirits that want to have my heart. We he to acknowledge that. Often they want to occupy our hearts by force or temptation. Jesus is the only one who wants to come into our hearts by our choice. He has paid the price on the cross to make it possible. He continually says to us “Repent – Metanoia – Turn around – Turn to me”

Let us remember what the battle is about as we approach Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Let’s not forget why Jesus did what he had to do – he wants our hearts.

And let’s again renew our commitment to him this week.

Amen.