

# Sermon Text for March 29,2015

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Isaiah 50:4-9a, Mark 11:1-11

“Just as planned”

It is so nice to be behind the pulpit again. So many of you have given such positive feedback to the disability awareness Sunday that we had a few weeks ago. The message which then leads to a plan and a ministry is something we can all look forward to. Last week as we received new members and had Bailey Pickens preach it was another planned opportunity that went well and gave us an opportunity to grow and hear the prophetic voice of God.

It is so fulfilling when our plans come together and things work out as planned. You all aren't on plan, did you know that? If you look in your bulletin you'll see check marks that you were supposed to check off as we made our way through this service. We figured we've had two Sundays without bulletins that you might be a little disoriented so we wanted to bring things back to normalcy for you.

For our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Stacy and I went away for a night and my mom watched the kids. The girls were 3, 5, and 7 and we were living in Florida. We weren't too used being away from the kids, and it was probably one of the first times that we had spent the night away from the kids. We called them that evening and the kids were doing great and grandma was happy to watch them at our house.

We pulled into our dirt road at the end of the lane and in the middle of the road in a huge puddle was Bethany playing and making mud pies probably without many clothes on. As we pulled in the driveway we looked up in our enormous live oak and Rachel had taken out every pillow in our house and put them about 30 feet in the air getting herself comfortable in a branch while she was reading a book. As we pulled into the garage there was Naomi with a hammer and a box of nails and some 2X4s hammering away to her hearts content, and I don't believe she was wearing safety goggles. When we got in the house there was my mom drinking her tea and watching the kids out the window. She looked at us and smiled and said: I hope everything went as planned.

We all make plans in our lives and think and pray that they may be God's plans. We had planned to be in Italy for 7 years and then lifelong missionaries in China. But God had other plans. It took a navy admiral in Moscow, the embassy defense attache who said to me, you're a pastor when I had made other plans to be in administration in the church. That has allowed me today to look forward to what God just might do here over the next 20 years.

In our Gospel of Mark on this Palm Sunday we read about an event that was planned by our Savior for his disciples and everything went exactly as planned. It went as Jesus had planned but not at all as how the disciples expected. This Scripture today is given to us to realize the importance of seeking out God's plan and purpose for our life especially when it is in contrast to our own plans. The main point of this story in Mark about the colt is that Jesus took the initiative to arrange and that every step of the preparation occurred through divine foreknowledge and according to plan. The same can be said of each of our lives if we have the eyes to see it. Let's read.

I love Palm Sunday. At the beginning of the service we had a dance company interpret what that day looked like as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. It was a celebration with children leading the way, as Katie Barge led us in the call to worship.

But before all of the celebration that we find in the Scripture with the singing and the dancing there was an orchestrated plan in place. Some have called these verses a carefully staged Messianic theater. Or another way to put it is that from start to finish God knew what he was doing today.

Verse 1 of chapter 11 gives us some great insight into Jesus' planning. We begin in vs. 2-3 with Jesus giving his disciples a checklist of things to do so that everything can go as planned. First: go into the village, next find a colt, then untie it, then bring it, then and only if you have to, answer a question. Okay, you've got your list, now go do it.

We find the disciples follow everything just as Jesus planned. We are in vs. 4 now. They went away presumably into the village, check, they find a colt, check, they begin to untie it, check, but then they are asked a question so they have to answer it and jump a little ahead in their check list but they were up to the challenge. They answer the question, check, and then bring the colt to Jesus. From start to finish on Palm Sunday, these beginning verses at least are completely scripted and are going exactly as planned.

But then verses 7-11 which are arguably the heart of this passage, is completely unscripted. We don't have laid out before us the plans as they are envisioned by either the disciples or Jesus. But we can assume that we know what the disciples are thinking. They see all of this preparation and all of this work as getting ready to introduce to the people of Israel their new king. Their literal new king. They had him ride into Jerusalem not as a pilgrim like everyone else, but as a king about to take his throne.

So if we were to make a checklist for the disciples in these verses it would be the following: Ride into Jerusalem, set Jesus upon the throne or seat of power, establish the kingdom

promised by God. These are the plans we know the disciples had in mind. This Jesus is going to usher in as vs. 10 states so clearly, the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.

They had waited a long time for this, generations, actually, over 500 years, they had trained to be the ones to help usher in this kingdom. But they were so focused on what they had been told ever since they were little that the Messiah would bring in a political kingdom that they completely missed the kingdom that was coming as described by our Isaiah Scripture and being brought by the person described by Isaiah that we call the suffering servant.

Simply stated Jesus' plans were very different from those of the disciples even if up to this point they both seemed to be tracking and be the same. Jesus' plans originate in Zechariah 9:9 which states "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion, shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding a donkey." We are tracking except for the whole humble part of that. But this word is the defining aspect of Jesus' kingdom. The disciples overlook that part so while the disciples say ride into Jerusalem victoriously, Jesus says ride, humbly

These verses in Isaiah describe not an enthronement but rather someone who was not accepted by anyone. Some not enthroned but tortured and beaten. Someone not whose kingdom was established but rather ridiculed, spat upon. Jesus' plans had been foretold since the Old Testament, he knew what he was doing. Things did go just as planned, as Jesus had planned, but the disciples missed it completely.

There is a movement in the Palm Sunday service from one of celebration and joy and triumph to a recognition that God's plan include the betrayal, the torture, the death of Jesus our Savior. There is this gradual movement to the stark reality that death draws near. Our service reflects that same movement. It is also a recognition that we missed what God had planned, even as the events seemed to us as leading in a direction that we wanted, they actually are leading where God had planned for our salvation.

Scripture reflects life doesn't it? We have our own checklist of things that we feel define what our lives ought to reflect and we do offer them to God so that he can bless them and then we can charge ahead. What are some of our plans, our goals in life? Be healthy, go to college, get a job, get married, buy a house, have kids, and then the cycle continues.

Some say that we make our plans and God laughs. That's not exactly right. God wants our good. He wants our joy. He wants us to be thankful. He wants us to check those things off because in many ways they provide us a sense of fulfillment, an understanding that God is

blessing us. We almost use it as proof. The more things we can check off the more we can be certain that God loves us.

What are your goals and plans for you personally? Your family and your job? What are your dreams, for this church, your family that we call the church? We have been praying for over three years now for a revival in this community and asking God to show us how we can play a role in that. We are a step closer to that than we have ever been. I had coffee this past week with Curt Seaburn the lead pastor at Victory Church and let me tell you we should be dancing in the streets that we are getting fellow workers in the field to work alongside us.

How many of you complain if you have more helpers or workers to clear the fields, or to get work done. Some see other churches in this community as competition. That is not God's plan, that's our sinful nature talking. I wish there were 100 churches in Strasburg because we still have thousands of people who don't know Jesus. They hope to have a pastor here in June and then begin services in October. We should all make it a point to worship there on a Sunday in 2015 to welcome and encourage these new colleagues in our midst. That was not my plan when we began that prayer for a revival, but it really seems to make sense now.

The same can happen in our lives. Are we open to Jesus taking our plans and turning them around in such a way that will lead us away from a selfish focus on ourselves and be able to see the broad stroke of Jesus' kingdom established on this earth. A kingdom that looks very different maybe than what we expected or what our plans may be.

The plan the disciples had was one of conquest, competition, eating the other people's lunch. The plan God has for us is one that should replace that plan with the plan of service and humility. From conquest to teamwork. From competition to collegiality. From eating other peoples' lunch to offering them our breakfast and dinner. That's God's plan which will ultimately benefit all of us as more and more people will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus in that plan. Amen.