

Mark 11:1-11
Palm Sunday
April 5, '09

"SPRING VACATION"

SPRING VACATION.

FOR MOST, IT'S OVER FOR THIS YEAR.

SPRING VACATION HAS NEVER MEANT MUCH TO ME.

WHILE GROWING UP, I DON'T REMEMBER HAVING A SPRING VACATION OR SPRING BREAK.

PERHAPS WE DID, BUT I DON'T REMEMBER IT.

THE ONLY SPRING BREAK I REMEMBER AS A CHILD WAS THE DAY A RATHER LARGE NEIGHBOR PLOPPED DOWN TOO HEAVILY ON OUR LIVING ROOM COUCH.

IN COLLEGE, I REMEMBER HAVING FRIENDS WHO WENT SOMEWHERE ON SPRING VACATION, BUT IT WAS NEVER A BIG DEAL.

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE YEAR, I DIDN'T GO ANYWHERE ON SPRING VACATION.

THERE WERE SEVERAL REASONS FOR THAT.

FOR ONE THING, I COULDN'T AFFORD IT.

FOR ANOTHER, I HAD TO WORK.

EVEN IF I *COULD* HAVE AFFORDED IT & EVEN I *HADN'T* HAD TO WORK, THE PLACES FRIENDS WOULD GO & THEIR ANTICIPATED ITINERARY NEVER HELD MUCH APPEAL TO ME.

THE ONE YEAR I DID DO SOMETHING ON SPRING BREAK WAS WHEN A COLLEGE ROOMMATE & I DECIDED TO GO VISIT A FRIEND WHO WAS A STUDENT AT YALE.

BERT & I HITCHHIKED FROM YPSILANTI, MICHIGAN TO NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT.

WHILE WE WERE THERE, THE THREE OF US DECIDED TO HITCHHIKE DOWN TO NEW YORK CITY FOR THE DAY.

WE HAD A GREAT TIME - JUST WALKING AROUND, VISITING THE CITY SIGHTS & BEING MESMERIZED BY THE SIZE OF THE CITY & THE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE EVERYWHERE.

AT THE END OF THE DAY, LATE THAT NIGHT, WE FOUND OURSELVES IN A LITTLE DINER ACROSS THE STREET FROM MADISON SQUARE GARDEN.

IT WAS ONLY THEN, CLOSE TO MIDNIGHT, THAT IT OCCURRED TO US THAT WE'D HAVE TO TRY TO FIGURE OUT HOW WE WERE GOING TO GET BACK TO CONNECTICUT EVEN THOUGH WE REALLY WANTED TO SPEND MORE TIME IN THE CITY THE NEXT DAY.

WE PUT ALL OUR MONEY TOGETHER & CAME UP WITH ABOUT 8 DOLLARS BETWEEN THE THREE OF US.

CLEARLY THAT WOULD NEITHER PAY FOR TRANSPORTATION OR A HOTEL.

WE HAD TO LEAVE THE BIG CITY, LATE AT NIGHT, AND FIND ANOTHER PLACE TO STAY ON OUR SPRING VACATION.

NOW THAT MAY SEEM TO BE A CONVOLUTED WAY TO INTRODUCE MARK'S PALM SUNDAY ACCOUNT, BUT THE LAST VERSE OF THIS PASSAGE SOUNDS, TO ME, REMARKABLY SIMILAR TO A SPRING VACATION EXPERIENCE.

LISTEN TO IT AGAIN: *"THEN 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."*

ISN'T THAT WHAT OFTEN HAPPENS ON A SPRING VACATION?

YOU CAN'T WAIT TO GET TO YOUR DESTINATION & AFTER A LONG DAY OF TRAVEL, YOU DECIDE TO JUST QUICKLY TAKE A LOOK AROUND & THEN HEAD BACK OUT OF TOWN TO YOUR HOTEL, GET A GOOD NIGHT'S REST & GET READY FOR THE FUN TO BEGIN THE NEXT DAY.

DON'T THESE WORDS IN MARK SOUND VERY MUCH LIKE THE BEGINNING OF A TYPICAL SPRING VACATION?

FOR MANY – IN AND AROUND JERUSALEM, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT *THIS* WAS.

NOT ONLY WAS THIS SPRINGTIME IN ISRAEL – IT WAS PASSOVER TIME.

THIS WAS A GREAT RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL & CELEBRATION.

ALL THE BOYS & GIRLS WOULD HAVE LOOKED FORWARD TO THIS TIME.

IT WAS AN 8-DAY SPRING VACATION – EIGHT DAYS OF NO WORK, NO SCHOOL.

EIGHT DAYS OF FEASTING & PARTYING & TAKING A TRIP TO THE BIG CITY.

YES, THIS WAS SPRING BREAK!

EVERYONE WENT TO JERUSALEM ON SPRING VACATION.

THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN AS MANY 2 MILLION PEOPLE THERE AT SPRING BREAK TIME.

PEOPLE WERE PUSHING & SHOVING & JOYOUSLY PREPARING FOR THE PASSOVER CELEBRATION.

THAT'S WHAT JESUS & THE DISCIPLES WOULD HAVE EXPERIENCED AS THEY ENTERED JERUSALEM.

FOR THEM, OF COURSE, THERE WAS AN ADDED DIMENSION.

REMEMBER, LAST WEEK WE CONCLUDED OUR LENTEN SERIES ON "MARK'S MARCH OF MIRACLES" IN THE VERSES IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE ONES WE READ THIS MORNING.

IT WAS THE STORY OF THE HEALING OF BLIND BARTIMAEUS.

YOU MAY RECALL THAT BARTIMAEUS WAS SHOUTING, *"SON OF DAVID! HAVE MERCY ON ME!"*

NOW THIS WAS AN ODD THING FOR HIM TO BE SAYING.

"SON OF DAVID."

IT'S THE ONE & ONLY TIME IN MARK'S GOSPEL WE HEAR THIS TITLE.

IT WAS ASSOCIATED WITH NATIONALISTIC & MILITARISTIC VISIONS OF THE PEOPLE – THE OVERTHROW OF ROMAN RULE.

YOU MAY ALSO RECALL THAT BARTIMAEUS THREW HIS CLOAK TO THE GROUND WHEN HE ENCOUNTERED JESUS.

LAST WEEK, WE POINTED OUT THAT MARK'S GOSPEL IS VERY INTENTIONALLY & CAREFULLY ARRANGED.

THIS IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THAT.

AS JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM, THE PEOPLE ARE, IN ESSENCE, SHOUTING OUT THE SAME THING THAT BARTIMAEUS WAS SHOUTING – "HOSANNA" – A CALL FOR MERCY – "SAVE US, WE PRAY!"

LIKE BARTIMAEUS, THOSE IN THE CROWD THREW THEIR CLOAKS TO THE GROUND IN REVERENCE.

BARTIMAEUS WAS PREPARING US FOR THE PALM SUNDAY ENTRANCE OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM.

BUT LET'S GO BACK TO THE SPRING VACATION PARALLELS.

WHEN YOU'RE TAKING A SPRING VACATION, PART OF THE FUN IS LOOKING FORWARD TO EVERYTHING THAT LIES BEFORE YOU IN THAT SPRING BREAK WEEK.

REMEMBER, YOU'VE GONE BACK TO YOUR HOTEL AFTER A QUICK LOOK AROUND AT THINGS.

YOU'RE ANTICIPATING THE EXCITEMENT THAT AWAITS YOU IN THE COMING DAYS.

FOR JESUS, THE COMING DAYS WERE ANYTHING *BUT* EXCITING.

HIS SPRING VACATION WASN'T A VACATION AT ALL.

SPRING *BREAK* FOR HIM MEANT A BREAKING OF PROMISES BY HIS FOLLOWERS, A BREAKING OF LAWS BY THE AUTHORITIES & A BREAKING OF BONES BY HIS EXECUTIONERS.

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THE ONLY THING THAT DIDN'T BREAK THAT WEEK WAS HIS WILL & HIS COMMITMENT.

IT WAS A WEEK FILLED WITH TORTURE & TORMENT.

THEY WERE DAYS FILLED WITH AGONY, DENIAL & BETRAYAL.

THEY WERE DAYS IN THAT GLORIOUS VACATION SPOT OF JERUSALEM THAT LED TO HIS ARREST & EVENTUAL & INEVITABLE EXECUTION.

IN MARK'S ACCOUNT OF PALM SUNDAY, NOTICE THE LENGTHY EXPLANATION HE OFFERS REGARDING THE COLT THAT WILL CARRY JESUS INTO JERUSALEM.

THERE'S A VERY IMPORTANT STATEMENT JESUS MAKES REGARDING THAT ANIMAL.

HE TELLS THE DISCIPLES WHO ARE SENT FOR IT THAT IT WILL BE "*A COLT THAT HAS NEVER BEEN RIDDEN.*"

AGAIN, WE FIND MARK'S GOSPEL VERY INTENTIONALLY & CAREFULLY ARRANGED.

NO ONE HAS EVER RIDDEN THIS COLT.

NO ONE HAS EVER DONE THIS BEFORE.

NO ONE HAS EVER PAID SUCH A PRICE OR TAKEN SUCH A RISK.

BACK TO MY ONE & ONLY SPRING BREAK EXPERIENCE.

THERE I WAS IN THAT DINER WITH BERT & FIGHTER (YEAH, THAT'S WHAT WE CALLED HIM).

IT WAS MIDNIGHT.

BETWEEN US WE HAD 8 DOLLARS & NOWHERE TO SPEND THE NIGHT.

FIGHTER GOT A BRILLIANT IDEA.

HE PLAYED ON YALE'S BASEBALL TEAM & A FEW WEEKS BEFORE, FORDHAM HAD BEEN UP THERE FOR A GAME.

FIGHTER HAD MET ONE OF THE FORDHAM PITCHERS & THE GUY TOLD HIM THAT HE SHOULD LOOK HIM UP IF HE WAS EVER IN NEW YORK.

WITH DIRECTIONS FROM OUR WAITRESS, WE GOT ON A BUS OUTSIDE THE DINER & TOOK IT SEVERAL MILES AWAY FROM DOWNTOWN TO FORDHAM.

WELL, ACTUALLY THE BUS DIDN'T TAKE US RIGHT THERE.

WE HAD TO GET OFF IN THE BRONX & THE DRIVER CAUTIONED US THAT WE'D HAVE A RATHER DANGEROUS 3 MILE WALK IN FRONT OF US IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

EVENTUALLY WE MADE IT & A SECURITY GUARD ON CAMPUS WAS ABLE TO HELP US LOCATE THE BASEBALL PLAYER'S DORM.

WE KNOCKED ON HIS DOOR ABOUT 3:00 A.M.

THE GUY HAD OBVIOUSLY BEEN SLEEPING WHEN HE OPENED THE DOOR TO HEAR FIGHTER SAY, "HEY, REMEMBER ME?"

I'M NOT SURE THAT HE DID, BUT HE TOLD US IT WAS FINE FOR US TO SPEND THE NIGHT – OR WHAT WAS LEFT OF IT – ON HIS DORM ROOM FLOOR.

THE NEXT DAY, BERT, FIGHTER & I DECIDED AGAINST MAKING THE JOURNEY BACK INTO THE CITY.

WE COULDN'T AFFORD IT.

IT WAS TOO BIG A RISK TO TRY IT AGAIN.

SO INSTEAD OF GOING BACK TO THE BIG CITY, WE HEADED NORTH & RETURNED TO SAFETY.

WHEN JESUS LEFT THE BIG CITY & FOUND A PLACE TO SPEND THE NIGHT, IT WOULD HAVE MADE PERFECT SENSE NOT TO GO BACK.

WHEN HE WOKE UP MONDAY MORNING, SURELY NO ONE WOULD HAVE BLAMED HIM IF HE'D DECIDED TO HEAD NORTH & BACK TO SAFETY.

COULD HE AFFORD TO RETURN TO A PLACE WHERE HIS VERY LIFE WAS THREATENED?

IT WAS A SERIOUS RISK TO GO BACK THERE.

AND YET, ASTONISHINGLY, THAT'S WHAT HE DID.

HE HAD ENTERED THE CITY THE DAY BEFORE ON A COLT THAT NEVER BEEN RIDDEN.

NO ONE HAD EVER GONE WHERE JESUS WAS ABOUT TO GO.

IGNORING THE COST & FULLY AWARE OF THE RISK, HE CHOSE TO GO BACK TO JERUSALEM.
HE WILLINGLY CHOSE TO DIE SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE.
THE COMING DAYS OF JESUS' SPRING VACATION - THE DAYS OF HOLY WEEK PROVIDE US AN
OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON THAT PRICE & THAT RISK.
HE DIDN'T HAVE TO DO IT.
HE COULD HAVE STEPPED OUT OF THAT HOTEL IN BETHANY, TURNED NORTH & HEADED BACK
TO GALILEE – A PLACE OF SAFETY FOR HIM.
BUT – FOR YOU – HE TURNED HIS EYES TO JERUSALEM & WENT WHERE NO ONE HAD EVER GONE
BEFORE.
HE TOOK THE RISK & HE PAID THE PRICE.
WHAT WILL YOU DO IN RETURN?
WHAT RISK IS GOD CHALLENGING *YOU* TO TAKE?
WHAT PRICE IS GOD ASKING *YOU* TO PAY?
I URGE YOU TO REFLECT ON THAT THIS WEEK.
ENTER JERUSALEM WITH JESUS.
GO TO THE UPPER ROOM & GETHSEMANE.
FOLLOW HIS JOURNEY TO CALVARY.
CONSIDER THE RISK HE TOOK & THE PRICE HE PAID.
AND THEN ASK GOD WHAT YOU'RE BEING CALLED TO DO IN RETURN. AMEN.

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