

A Sermon for DaySpring

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Matthew 21.1-11

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Yesterday I spent the day here in the woods for a seminary covenant group silent retreat. The weather was perfect for a prayer, a good book, and a nap. And also it was a perfect day, as it were with seminary colleagues, to reflect on what it means to be a pastor. As pastor, I feel like I wear multiple hats and have multiple responsibilities, which is something important to communicate to seminary students—all the different things that one does as a pastor. I preach, of course, except when we're all treated to wonderful guest preachers like Abby last week. I teach almost weekly in some capacity and get to also hear wise teachers like Brett and others lead in various ways. I lead prayers and are often led by others, I'm thinking of Les and Candy Neugebauer, who lead centering prayer in our chapel on Wednesday morning. So I do a lot of different things. I get to read and write and dedicate babies and baptize new Christians and welcome guests and sometimes work with architects and accountants on future plans and electricians on current problems. Sometimes I get to repair toilets and garden hoses and I know how to push a broom around every room in this church.

When I was beginning to come to a clear sense of how I was called into ministry, I wondered what a pastor does during the week. Now I wonder is there anything a pastor doesn't do. There's one task above all others that I think I'm supposed to do but doesn't fit on any job description I've seen, but it's a job I believe I'm uniquely qualified for: To consult with Jesus about what he's got in mind. Job description or title: Chief Consultant. This, I believe is my calling. My consulting would be extremely valuable to him. Today, let me tell you about a conversation about he and I in which I give salient advice, and he definitely expresses gratitude for my assistance. Think of this as a Palm Sunday consultation session.

For example, he would say to me,

So, I have this idea.

And I would say,

Ok, go on. Lay it on me, I'm ready, I was born for this."

I've been walking a long way, about 100 miles, from Galilee up north to this town, Bethphage. And tomorrow, we're all going to head into Jerusalem. It's Passover you know.

Yes, I know, of course.

So we're going to go into the city.

Yes.

To celebrate Passover.

Right, I got it.

You remember what Passover is about?

he would ask.

Of course. Passover remembers the night God led Israel out of slavery in Egypt. We all get together and eat. It's fun.

Yes, it's fun, but you get it right?

Yes. Passover? Sure. We're going to do the liturgy, say the prayers,
eat the food, remember how God was faithful to our ancestors in slavery.
It will be nice.

*No, you're still not getting it. You're living in the **was**. Join me in the **is**.
I'm going into Jerusalem. Tomorrow. At Passover.
With all the people here from all over; and the Roman soldiers on high alert.*

Ok, I'd say, stroking my lush beard as a consultant does.
Well, this is dangerous for you, you know how you can be, but if you just keep your head
down, keep quiet, you'll blend in. You know, talk less, smile more. Don't let them know
what you're against or what you're for. The Romans can't pick one Jewish man out from
the big crowds and the scribes, chief priests, and Pharisees will be busy planning the
services and managing the celebrations. We'll be fine. Go for it. Let's be a little brave.
Have a little courage. Isn't it always you who says, 'Don't be afraid?'

(See, this is what consultants do best. Take something the client says as one of their core values, and
then, at just the right moment, we remind them of that so that we teach them to call upon their key
motivations for their most important decisions. I'm really good at this)

Jesus pauses.

*I'm not afraid. I don't intend to keep my head down. I don't intend to talk less or smile more. It's
time that everyone knows what I'm against and who I'm for.
I want you to go on ahead and get a donkey from a guy in the next village. Tell him the Lord
needs it. Bring it to me. I'm riding a donkey down this hill through the city gates and into the city.*

Whoa, there partner. You're not doing that.
I am not letting you do that. You don't know what you're doing.
You know that everyone will think immediately about
King David riding a donkey into the city, right?

Yes, I'm a son of David, so I know a little something about David.

The Romans will think you think you're a new king coming to overthrow them.

*Yes, I'm a Jew so I know a little something about the powers and principalities, empires and
kingdoms.*

[pause]

Do you think you're a new king coming into Jerusalem to establish a new kingdom?

He just says,

Go get the animal. Get two. A donkey and a colt.

Two animals? Jesus, nobody needs to ride two animals at one time,
and if I do that for you and you come with two animals,
you know what people will think about, right?
They'll think about Zechariah, the prophet.

You think about Zechariah?

Well, not very often, but I am a pastor, so I know a little something about the Bible.

(I'm getting a little salty now, so I take a deep breath and tone it down.)

Zechariah . . . Jesus, don't you know you're playing with fire here. They may not know all the
other minor prophets, but they'll know this one talks about a new king riding in on a donkey and

colt—two animals—no one will miss this. And they'll remember the rest of it, too.
The rest of Zechariah, about God turning over the tables and God restoring Israel and God
throwing out the occupiers. They remember the rest of it, Jesus.

They've been waiting for that day to come.
This is not keeping your head down, keeping quiet, slipping in and out of the city. You can't pick
a worse time to be more provocative. Zechariah says the king is coming in with the two animals
and then it says, "I will cut off the war horse and chariot and the battle bow."
If I read Zechariah right, it says that a revolution is beginning right here, right now with the king
coming into the city, a kingdom of new peace which will extend from sea to sea.

Jesus, those people down there in the city.
They are under Roman rule right now, the so-called Roman peace.
The most powerful force the world has ever known.
That's all they've ever known. They aren't happy about it but it's all they've ever known.
And you know what Romans do to disruptors.

Yes.

You know what Romans do to revolutionaries.

Yes.

You know what Romans do to people who stir up trouble.

Yes.

You know what Romans do to people who are the son of King David.

Yes.

If you ride a donkey into the city of Jerusalem, at Passover, you know what will happen.

Yes.

You won't overthrow Rome.

I know.

But people will think that's what you think you're doing.

I know.

And you still plan to do it, anyway?

I will do it because this is the way.

The way to what? **Lay it on me.** Jesus.
You've asked me to be your right-hand man, to give you advice on everything.
You wanted me to be your consultant, to help you know what to do
and make reasonable decisions, to help you be safe.

No, I actually didn't do any of that.

Well, irregardless . . .

That's not a word.

Well, anyways . . .

Also not a word.

Well, look, what I'm saying, what I'm asking you is this: this is the way to what?
To what? You're young, you're in good health, you're a good teacher, and you've come a long
way. Some say you're even a prophet—how about that—that's good, right? Now you're about
to throw it all away. They will kill you. The only crown you're going to wear is made of thorns.
They may kill all of us. For what?

For them.

Who?

All of them.

Who . . . all of **them**? People? They're just people.
 They are pawns in the system, man.
 They are stiff-necked, feckless, sheep without a shepherd.
 They are sleepwalking in the night.
 They are boats without oars.
 They are not worthy to untie the laces of your sandals.
 They will turn on you.

Yes.

Yes?

*Yes. They are afraid.
 They are sheep without a shepherd; they are made in the image of God
 but have had their dignity taken from them; they are weary and my yoke is easy;
 they are hurting and my heart is open; they are lost and I am seeking them.
 You are afraid.*

You're right. I am, Jesus.

Do not fear.

You've said that a lot.

But have you listened yet? Go get the animals.

Jesus?

Yes.

I'm afraid. Can't we just slip in and just go to the temple and make some prayers.
Oh, I'm going there too.

I don't really care for the way you just said that.
I have some business with the businessmen who have taken over my father's house.

You aren't heeding my advice.

I didn't ask for it.

Well, true, but listen, you're provoking the Romans and the religious leaders.
 Are you sure you know what you're doing?
 Are you? Are you sure?
 Because you better be sure.
 You better know what you're doing. There better be some plan here, some way out.

And it's right then that he looks at me. He sees right through me.

*I know you're afraid. I get it. I am, too. We all are.
 But we are not prisoners of fear. Didn't you read your Zechariah?
 We are not prisoners of fear—we are prisoners of hope.
 We are bound by hope not only for this one life and whatever happens but also for the life to
 come, for the lives of our children and their children, for God's grace to us beyond this life and its
 death. We are prisoners by hope to do what is right, what is courageous, what is needed when
 it's needed, and we are not prisoners of despair. Who do you say that I am?*

They say you're a good man, a teacher with authority, a good influence on our lives and
 children; you are an inspiration to live reasonably good lives; some say you're a path to

financial gain, or cultural acceptance, or social standing. There are some who say you're a fake, a figment of western social values, you're an icon of oppression and hate. And some people use your name in all kinds of terrible ways, but we're working on that as best we can. People say lots of things about you, endlessly. It never really ends.

Who do you say that I am?

Well, my parents said ..

Who do say?

Well, my frie ..

The time has come, O giver of advice. The time has come, O chief consultant.

The day has come to decide what you believe, what you live for, and what you're willing to lay down your life for. Who do you say I am?

You are Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

You are the messiah.

You are our only hope, the image of God, you are my hope.

You are the stone the builders rejected that God has made the cornerstone.

You are the good shepherd, the high priest, the king of kings and Lord of Lords.

You are my grace. You are the hope of the world. And you must do this thing.

And it starts today.

Go get the animals.

I will do whatever you ask.

Jesus?

Yes?

Forgive me.

I already have.

Remember me when you come into your kingdom.

I will, I promise. I will be with you always, to the end of the age.

I leave to go get the animals, two of them, a strange and old sign that no one will forget. And everyone will think they understand. And I go humming a tune that is both harrowing and hopeful:

Hosanna to the Son of David.

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

Hosanna in the highest.

It turns out I learned Jesus doesn't need or want our advice. He just asks us to trust him, to follow him. This week of all weeks, we simply bear witness to his faithfulness and love. This is our only task. But it is, for such a time as this, the most important commission in the world. And for him and for it, we say thanks be to God.