

On a Collision Course Mark 11:1-11

Holy week has arrived. The Lenten journey of walking with Christ to the cross is almost finished. In some ways, life will soon get back to normal; that is if there is such a thing as normal after an encounter with God. Lent takes my soul directly on a collision course with God by examining how I am living up to the church expectations, societies expectations, and God's expectations. The intersection of these roads can be very powerful when God has the most impact on your life. If you have never experienced a collision with the Holy Spirit you can be in for a real treat. You will know the moment when Christ has entered deeper into your soul. Suddenly you will find yourself flying in a direction that you never thought you would go, you are excited about it, and you find your life has changed forever. Sounds amazing, right? It can be, but there are a few bumps, pain, and fear along the way. Let's see how Jesus and the disciples handle the collision.

We enter the city of Jerusalem at the holiest time of year. The city is filled with Jews who have arrived for the Passover, celebrating how Moses lead their ancestors to freedom after four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. It's a day of rejoicing. The city is practically wall to wall with people of every kind. Looking around, it is evident that there is more going on here

than just a peaceful celebration. The city is not only filled with Jews, but Roman soldiers are also very present. Through one city gate Pontius Pilate, the ruling governor, rides in on his white stallion surrounded by military forces. His grand entrance is a clear display that the Roman authority is still the ruling voice. Any rebel group trying to sway the crowd against Roman rule will quickly be silenced by the massive military. Pilate sets his army headquarters close to the Temple so he can keep an eye on everyone.

Pilate has good reason to be mindful of everyone. This celebration is not only about freedom from the past, but also a day to watch for the next great ruler that has yet to come and set the Jews free from the Pharisees, Religious Leaders, and Roman Empire. The need for freedom has arrived because the Pharisees and Religious leaders have transformed the Temple to focus on the elite and set aside those who are weaker, poorer, and powerless. In fact, these so called leaders have allowed the outer courts of the Temple to be used as a marketplace where sellers have almost made it impossible to purchase sacrifices for this Holy Day. It's feels like all they want is money and money to them means power and authority. God is almost inexistent. Imagine a Passover celebration without a focus on God. Something is wrong with this picture. The church is not longer concerned

about anything but its own power and prestige in the community and with the Roman Empire.

Then it happened, voices could be heard at another entrance into the city. They were shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!” As the sea of people parted, the road had been covered with palm branches and coats; but a man was riding into the city on a donkey. He was surrounded by the people the church had rejected; the poor, the powerless, and the sick who had been healed. They were reacting as though they had just been welcomed by the King. They were singing, laughing, waving their Palm branches as the children ran, danced, and played. This was the welcome of a very powerful man, even more powerful than Pontius Pilate or any church or Pharisee leader. Who was this man? What would happen when he collided with the church and Pilate?

As you know, the man was Jesus and he was entering Jerusalem for a very specific purpose. He was the new King who would rule God’s people in a very special manner, but first there were a few things that needed to be tended to by Jesus. First, Jesus send the Disciples to go and prepare for the Passover feast. God came first for Jesus. The purpose for coming to Jerusalem was to celebrate by giving thanks to God for allowing

the angel of death to pass over their ancestors so they would walk freely out of Egypt. It was what came later that lead Jesus to his earthly death. Michael Slaughter writes, “Jesus was crucified not simply for being a religious rabbi; he was crucified for advocating a revolutionary movement that threatened the religious and political interests.”¹ Jesus’ reaction to how God’s temple was being used was anger and fury as he turned over the tables and reclaimed God’s temple as a house of prayer. How dare Jesus bring God back into the church?

Sometimes, I wonder if Western culture has done the same thing to the church, today. Have we become so focused on the image of being apart of the church that it is become more important than being the church? My fear is that the answer to this question is “yes” because, at some point in history, clergy failed to create opportunities for the church to collide with the Holy Spirit. I believe that everyone is created in the image of God but not everyone has been hit with the Holy Spirit of God. As I said earlier, you will know when you have been hit by God’s Holy Spirit. It is an amazing experience that will change how you see the world and clarify your life’s mission. So, I invite you to prepare yourself for a collision with God.

¹ Slaughter, Mike (2014-12-16). *Renegade Gospel - Large Print Edition: The Rebel Jesus* (Kindle Locations 1332-1333). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

You see, today we celebrate that Jesus has come to set us free from ourselves and this earthly world. The place Christ is preparing for us is in God's heavenly kingdom where we will live for eternity. However, the only way to reach that home is to walk with Jesus, in our own way, to the cross where Jesus, the church, and Pilate collide. It's a painful collision only in the sense that I am called to look at myself as I relate to God, the church, and society through my life. The question before me in this Holy Week experience is have I been the church of the Pharisees, ignoring the people who need to hear about God? Have I been the church of Jesus who has ventured to the people who need God and listened, taught, and offered them Christ. Michael Slaughter writes, "Saying yes to Jesus is an all-out, all-in commitment to go where Jesus goes, be who Jesus is, do what Jesus does, and give what Jesus gives for the life of the world that God loves and gives himself for."² Are you ready to walk the way of the cross? Are you ready to put God first and say to your friends, family, coaches, etc. that you are busy Thursday and Friday spending time with God? I hope your answer is yes and you are ready to meet God's Holy Spirit.

I will be honest, I have no idea where this course will lead you or me, but I do know that I have faith that God will take care of us all. The time

² Slaughter, Mike (2014-12-16). Renegade Gospel - Large Print Edition: The Rebel Jesus (Kindle Locations 1351-1352). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

has arrived. The expectation is that on this journey you will encounter Christ in a way that is special and unique to you. My personal expectation is that once you have experienced Christ alive in your heart, you will find a way to be in ministry in this community. You are not volunteers who come when it is convenient. You are all called Disciples, students of God, who come to serve God by bringing others into God's Holy family. Today we begin the march to the cross where our spirits will be in a collision with Jesus, Pilate, and the Church. Let the journey begin.