

032821 Palm Sunday Mark 11:1-11
Reality Road Series: "Reality+"

How many of you have Disney+ at home? You may be able to watch the Disney channel on your TV, but only if you pay extra money can you peruse tons of great Disney extras via the Disney+ streaming service. Or, you can view the Discovery Channel, and then there's Discovery+. Hulu, and Hulu+. I'll be checking the basketball scores this afternoon on my phone's ESPN app; but if I want to access all of their best sports content, I need to pay more for ESPN+. Lots of media companies are using that plus sign to find new ways to provide extra content, and to make extra money.

We've been talking for forty days about the Reality Road. Let's talk today about Reality+. In our Palm Sunday Bible story, we see how some people thought they were fully tuned in to life's important realities, but Jesus had access to Reality+. And the Lord today is offering full, free Reality+ for you and me, too.

Let's see what was happening on that first Palm Sunday. A large crowd is gathered, outside the Jerusalem city walls. There's an excited buzz, a super-charged vibe. The crowd is revved up because Jesus of Nazareth is coming to town. They've all heard about this amazing miracle man. He heals sick people. He casts out demons. He provides food for thousands of people at a time. And the latest news? Jesus raised a man from the dead!

On Palm Sunday, the crowd is electrified, because the man of the hour, Jesus, has proved that he can address many of the hardest, saddest realities of their lives. There is so much sickness in their land. So much poverty. So much suffering. Jesus isn't some ivory tower theologian, or an abstract intellectual theorist. The crowd sees Jesus as a man of the

people, a person who understands reality – their reality. They're excited, because they believe Jesus can help them, benefit them, and actually do something about the ugly realities in their lives.

Even more, they have hopes that this Jesus will take action against the ugliest reality they know. The hated Romans have conquered their land. Roman troops patrol their streets. Roman governors pass down harsh laws. Roman taxes choke them financially. The crowd is sick and tired of this Roman reality in their land. They're hoping that Jesus will be the one to change that reality, set them free, lead a revolt, and return their nation to glory.

So, yes, the crowd waiting for Jesus on Palm Sunday is focused on reality -- some very important realities. And aren't we just like that crowd? The realities of our lives are all we really care about, most of the time. Our concerns, our priorities, our problems, our heartaches. There are plenty of joys and blessings in this world. But the realities of life can be cruel. The realities of this world can be exhausting and overwhelming. Sickness, poverty, abuse, crime, war, terrorism. On and on the list goes. Racism, sexism, corruption, immorality, family troubles, global pandemics, natural disasters. These are the realities we face, realities we focus on, pray about, and lose sleep over. Just like the crowd, we're eager to see Jesus address our problems and resolve our realities.

In our Bible story, Jesus finally arrives, He parades into Jerusalem, riding a donkey. The crowd goes wild. They're fired up. Boldly, they sing, "Hosanna," which means, "Save now." They wave palm branches, symbols of royal acclamation. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," they chant. "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David." They use this Biblical language to praise

Jesus as their God-given King, their Messiah. They're ready to follow him. "Finally, our reality is going to change," they think. All Jesus needs to do is say the word, give the signal.

But what does Jesus do? Verse 11: "And 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."

Jesus takes all the air out of this highly-charged scene. He sees the crowds. He notices their palms. He listens to their cheers. He knows all about the realities they're focused on. And while the Lord certainly has sympathy for those oppressed by the Romans, empathy for those suffering sickness, compassion for those putting their kids to bed hungry, those are not the only realities Jesus has come to address. Those are not the most urgent realities Jesus is about to tackle in Holy Week.

Jesus is focused on Reality+. And Jesus wants you and me to do the same.

What do we mean by Reality+? It means seeing the bigger picture, the broader reality. There are realities that we see, experience, and grapple with in the here and now. And then there are unseen realities, cosmic realities, spiritual realities that supersede them all. Our day-to-day realities are important. And I know that the Lord Jesus would never be dismissive about the everyday struggles of our lives. He knows those realities, and he truly cares about them.

But Jesus cares even more about your eternal destiny. He's concerned even more about saving your soul, and getting you right with God. Jesus sees all the perils and dangers that surround you on the spiritual plane: the temptations and

enticements, the forces of evil, the consequences of your sin, the reality of eternal separation from God.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus knows that his time is at hand to tackle all of that. He has come to Jerusalem to address humanity's deepest needs, our ultimate reality. His road is leading him to the cross. Jesus comes to Jerusalem to make the sacrifice, to take on himself the punishment for our sins.

The Palm Sunday crowd is left disappointed, because Jesus isn't focusing on their realities. And, yet, in truth, he is. Jesus is tuned in to Reality+. He's not there just to feed them, heal them, and set their nation free. He's there to set them free forever, to heal them for all eternity, to feed them – and to feed you -- with the bread of everlasting life.

Today Jesus offers you and me full, free Reality+, as well. "Start seeing the bigger picture of your life," he says. "Start focusing on what's really important. Start setting more godly priorities, chasing holier pursuits, and letting God's voice direct you day to day."

How do we get Reality+? Worship, devotion, Scripture, Sacraments, prayer, reflection, service, stewardship, study, discipleship, fellowship, confession. Your God is ready and able to go to work in your life via all of those realities.

As we begin Holy Week today, let's give thanks to God for Jesus, who walked the reality road for us, all the way to the cross. And, with God's help, let's tune in every day to Reality+. Amen.