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Title: *Jesus' Annual Review*

Texts: Mark 11:1-11, *NRSV*; Philippians 2:5-11, *The Message*

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."' They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

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.

- Mark 11:1-11, *NRSV*

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

- Philippians 2:5-11, *The Message*

Imagine that it is time for Jesus of Nazareth to receive his annual review. This may seem quite odd to say, for how does one offer feedback – how does one review our greatest teacher and our redeemer? Yet – imagine for a moment that you are the chair of personnel committee... and you are given the challenging task of reviewing Jesus Christ... what he is good at... and what he needs to work on...

To do this, we would need to see ourselves in the characters in the Bible. To properly review Jesus – in the way any staff person would be reviewed in the corporate world, we would need to imagine what our reaction would be when Jesus speaks... and when he acts...

I wonder what Peter felt when Jesus looked at him and said: “Get behind me Satan!” (Matthew 16:23)

What did the Rich Young Ruler think when Jesus told him very directly: “Sell all your possessions and distribute your money to the poor?” (Luke 18:18-23)

What went through the man’s mind... when he was seeking a proper burial for his father... and Jesus said: “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

What did the people throughout the gospel of Matthew and Luke do when he called them hypocrites?

If these individuals had the chance to conduct Jesus' annual review, I think it would be very interesting what we might hear.

Now – let me carefully point out that each reference from the Bible I am bringing out... requires very close interpretation... exegesis... and we must study them in their appropriate context. Yet – my general point that I am bringing out with these texts is this: *If people in the bible had the chance to conduct Jesus' annual review, they would offer both positive and negative feedback.*

Perhaps there were some people in the crowd who thought that Jesus' use of the word “hypocrites” was inflammatory language.

If Peter was given the chance maybe he would have said: “Do you remember Jesus when you looked at me and said: “Get behind me Satan!?” Well – that actually hurt my feelings.

Maybe the man who was seeking a proper burial for his father thought that Jesus was a little insensitive when he said: “Let the dead bury the dead...” which implied that someone else outside of his family be responsible for burying his father.

What would you do if you were in charge of Jesus' annual review?

I'll admit: the question seems absurd! Maybe even sacrilegious! For how does one offer feedback – how does one review our greatest teacher and our redeemer?

And yet – when I sit with the question a little longer... I find that in the question... there is place of healing for me... and place of healing for us.

Ask yourself (and be honest with your answer)...what aspect of Jesus' ministry poses a great challenge to you? Is there a story in the bible that you just cannot get your head around? Does one of Jesus' teachings stand out in particular as confronting to you?

If you can't think of one right now, I want you to find a story or one of Jesus' teachings, which you find challenging, this week. I want you to think of a story

or teaching that you would bring up to Jesus at his annual review as one that is bothering you.

I think the two most conflicting topics in this church might be: sports and politics. What would our church do if Jesus chose between State and Ol' Miss? I think there might be a little chaos! I wonder whether Jesus rooted for the Nazareth teams or the away teams.

Perhaps during Jesus' annual review – some might admit to say that he was too political. I don't think he would deny it, for Jesus' ministry – at its very essence – was political. Jesus' ministry was very much at odds with the political culture of the day. Jesus' death came as a result of that political tension; he died on a political cross.

Palm Sunday is the culmination of Jesus' political ministry.

“Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30 (that first Palm Sunday).”

“On one side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial Calvary and soldiers. Pilate's procession proclaimed the power of empire.”

“Imagine the imperial procession's arrival in the city. A visual panoply of imperial power: calvary on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. Sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful.”

“Pilate's procession displayed not only imperial power, but also Roman imperial theology. According to this theology, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome, but the Son of God.”

“Jesus' procession was a peasant procession. He rode from the east on a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers. Jesus was from the peasant village of Nazareth, his message was about the kingdom of God, and his followers came from the peasant class. They had journeyed to

Jerusalem from Galilee, about a hundred miles to the north, a journey that is the central section and the central dynamic of Mark's gospel."

As Mark tells the story in our scripture lesson this morning, "It is a prearranged counterprocession. Jesus planned it in advance."

Jesus' actions are rooted in the symbolism and ministry of the prophet Zachariah in the Jewish Bible. According to Zachariah 9:9, a king would be coming to Jerusalem "humble and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

"Jesus rides the colt down the Mount of Olives to the city surrounded by a crowd of enthusiastic followers and sympathizers, who spread their cloakes, strew leafy branches on the road, and shout, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David. Hosanna in the Highest heaven!'"

In my perception of the text, "...this appears to be a planned political demonstration!"

"Jesus' procession deliberately counters what is happening on the other side of the city. Pilate's procession embodies the power, glory, and violence of the empire that ruled the world. Jesus' procession embodies an alternative vision, the kingdom of God. This king, riding on a donkey will banish war from the land – no more chariots, war-horses, or bows. Commanding peace to the nations, he will be a king of peace. Zachariah 9:10 prophesies: 'He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations.'" (Borg and Crossan, *The Last Week* "Chapter 1")

Jesus' ministry appears to be political... and I think that it is! And yet, Jesus' ministry (also) transcends politics; it transcends a 2, 3 and 4 party system.

The paradox of Palm Sunday is that when they shout Hosanna, which means "save us," they were all thinking about the boot of the Romans on their throats – political salvation. Jesus comes to save, but in a way they never really understood or imagined.....*salvation of the soul*.....and we are all still trying to figure that one out!

What would we say at Jesus at Jesus' annual review? What would you say as chair of Personnel Committee?

Is Jesus too direct? Does he edge on being too political? Does Jesus claim his “inner authority” and “power” in the way we want him too – or does he seem to meek and humble at times?

What do we say about Jesus who “set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human” – who “didn't claim special privileges,” but “Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion?”

Give voice to your struggle with Jesus' message...his ministry... and you will find healing... and salvation in your journey.

I once heard a dialogue between friends. One friend said: “Don't question God! You really shouldn't question our Lord and Savior.” The other friend responded: “If I can't question God, to whom can I direct my questions!”

God can handle your most difficult questions. Christ is open to hear the aspects of his ministry that you find most challenging.

Treat your time with God as an annual review.

If you think Jesus is too direct at times... too meek... too political... or something else, Jesus is humble enough to hear the cry of your heart... and to draw you closer to him.

Of course, when you conduct an annual review of the Son of Man... we are also evaluating ourselves... and our *relationship* with Jesus. Just when we think we are doing Jesus' review, we are doing our own review!

Who really is on trial this Holy Week? Is it Jesus? Or is it you and me?¹

Jesus is our model. He is the model for how to live a life of service, given to the glory of God.²

The disciples had their judgments about Jesus' ministry; and yet, if Jesus listened to Peter and the other disciples, he would have never gone to Jerusalem. If he folded before Pilate and the other cronies, he could have gone his merry way...but instead, the only review that mattered was the one from his

¹ Insight from Tom Long

² Sentence from Bruce Reyes-Chow 365devotional, 2010

heavenly Father. He came, as he said, to show the world the love of God....a love that would lead to a cross....he came to finish the work his Father sent him to do...

“Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.” (Philippians)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sermon Note: The text on “Two processions entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday” comes from Chapter 1 of Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan’s book entitled *The Last Week*.