



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

Parade Time

SCRIPTURE:
Mark 11:1-11

April 10, 2022 – Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

I was in Boy Scouts and on a campout for the Order of the Arrow, they call it. I'm sure I was told what to expect, but like so many things at that time of my life, I wasn't paying attention. So, it took me by surprise when a scout leader tapped me on the shoulder, pointed to my right, and said, "Walk out there."

It was dusk and we were walking from the lodge out into the woods. No one was talking, as that was part of the Order of the Arrow weekend: No talking. As we walked, a scout leader behind me tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and he said, "Go fifty paces out there and spend the night. In the morning, come back to the lodge." I had camped before. Usually in a tent. And always with my buddies. But this was something I would do by myself and that changed everything. I walked my fifty paces. Found an open spot. Got into my sleeping bag, but did not use it for sleeping. It was dark and noisy and I was very much alone. Now, you know me and mornings—we are not close. But that morning, I was the third scout back at the lodge just after sunrise. It had been a long night.

Most things are harder if you have to do them alone. I think Jesus understood that. There was quite a crowd on Parade Day. Everyone who was anyone (or better said: everyone who was no one) was there. This was no ordinary parade. This was a gathering of oppressed and occupied people. They had seen parades before, but those were mostly Roman soldiers marching into town on horseback with the glint of steel flashing through the dust. The Roman parades were to remind the people of their place. To remind them of the real power in the world. To remind them that when it came to faith in God and the power of the sword, the sword would win. Vladimir Putin loves those parades.

But Jesus' parade was different. There were no

weapons. There was no intimidation. This was a joyful parade of folks who believed that the one on the donkey had come not to demean them or to destroy their children; no, he had come *for* them. He could see them. He could see their hopes, their fears, their dreams. He sees them and that's why he has come. He rides this donkey into the city because he loves the city and he would do anything for those he loves.

But there is an irony here. As clearly as Jesus sees them, their view of Jesus is blurred. This is a common thing in the life of Jesus and we have bumped into blindness throughout this gospel. And the inability to be seen must have left Jesus feeling a bit lonely. Mark, in a very artistic way, paints a picture of Jesus' loneliness.

The story has been all about the crowd, their singing, shouting "hosanna" and throwing branches on the ground. But when they reach the city, it's as if the crowd vanishes. It's as if we are watching a movie—the camera zooms in on Jesus and everyone else disappears.

It says he entered the city alone. This is a bit of spiritual art in Mark's gospel. It's Mark's way of telling us that even if the crowd is there—this part, this hard part—Jesus has to do by himself.

I've taken a while to get us to this point, but here's the sermon: Sometimes faithfulness is lonely. Sometimes when you are trying to stand tall, when everyone else is falling apart; sometimes when you are trying to speak the truth, when misinformation and lies fill the atmosphere; sometimes when you are trying to choose kindness, when everyone around you revels in calling out the failing of those they look down on—it can feel lonely.

In Jeremi Suri's book, "The Impossible Presidency," he reports, "Franklin Roosevelt once said, 'When you are president, you'll be looking at that door over

there and knowing that practically everybody who walks through it wants something out of you. You'll learn what a lonely job this is.'"¹ Well, I'm not president, thanks be to God, but I think the walk of faith can be lonely because what God wants is not often what those around us want.

You may remember that our signature mission this past year was Artists Helping the Homeless. Kar Woo, the director, was with us one Sunday last fall—telling us that he wanted to expand into Johnson County using a house that he already owned. Many of the people Kar serves worship with us in the Gathering. Kar and I have begun a friendship and I have learned that his move into Johnson County has been met with resistance. Some of it civil but some of it quite unkind. He has been called names and is being sued. He has had eggs thrown at his home. He told me he feels blessed to be doing this work, but it's also a bit lonely. I said, "Some day I should tell you about building a food pantry."

Sometimes trying to do what we are called to do can feel lonely. It was for Jesus. It probably has been for you, too. Because the truth is: The life that Jesus taught doesn't fit well in the world as it is.

Last week we welcomed Rev. Jimmie Hawkins to talk with us about the poor and the realities of racism in our world. That's not a new conversation for us. No, for more than 60 years Village Church has been engaged in this conversation but sometimes it has felt like lonely work.

Some of you are teaching children or feeding the hungry or working to build community in places the world has passed by. It's slow and there are always challenges and it can feel lonely. Some of you are laboring in a violent world to reduce the realities of gun violence in our culture and with every new shooting, it can feel like no one is listening. Some of you are caring for aging parents or raising little children, or just trying to do your jobs with dignity and commitment, and the work is slow and there are often setbacks. It can feel lonely.

I don't know what kept Jesus going when he realized that even those who loved him didn't quite see what he needed to do, what he must do. Unless he could imagine the day would come when there would be others who would follow him all the way and he

would not be so alone.

In the first years of our marriage, Carol's parents would visit often. They lived out of town, or as they said, we lived out of town. So when they came, they would stay for a while. I thought perhaps long enough to have their mail forwarded.

When my father-in-law visited, it was like having the gang from "This Old House" move in with you. He just cruised the house with a screwdriver. He was looking for things to repair. I would ask, "How can I help?" Knowing my deficiency in home repair, which to him seemed painfully obvious given the condition of our home, he would say, "Why don't you just go work on your sermon? I'm sure it needs it. I got this." I would come home at the end of the day and get the report, "I fixed that shelf in the closet and rewired the ceiling fan. You can open the window in the bedroom now. That leaky faucet was a breeze to fix—even you could have repaired that."

My mother-in-law was like having a combination of Martha Stewart and the OxiClean guy live with you. She cooked, sewed curtains, cleaned everything, even removed the knobs on the stove to clean under there. I didn't know those knobs came off. The whole time they were with us, I was saying, "You don't have to do that. No really, that's more than enough. You don't have to do that. We can dust the attic on your next visit. You don't have to do that."

Of course, I was wrong. They had to do it. There was not a 12-step program that could break them of this practice because this was the way they showed their daughter that they loved her more than life itself. And they were probably motivated a bit out of concern in her choice of husbands. They were very gracious and industrious but the truth be told, it would get on my nerves a bit. All of that changed with one visit.

A day after our daughter was born, they sent us home. I knew we were just visiting the hospital and hadn't actually moved there. But somehow, I thought I would feel more prepared. I had read the books. I had talked to some other dads, but I thought I would be more ready to be a dad. But now that I had a daughter, I didn't have a clue.

Within 24 hours, my in-laws arrived with their screwdrivers, cleansers and baby powder. I was so

1 Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office* (2017) p. XV.

grateful to see them. I knew what an amazing job they had done raising their little girl and I didn't want to do this alone. It took their visit and my growing up a bit to realize I may not know what I'm doing, but I'm not alone. I think because Jesus was willing to go it alone, when it comes to the things that really matter, we don't have to.

Kar Woo said to me, "I hope we have not caused Village any difficulty." He knew some of his neighbors had contacted us as well—not all of them kind. I said, "Kar, you do not need to apologize. We are proud of what you are doing and we are in it with

you. You are not alone."

This walk of faith can be lonely, but God has given us each other. Don't take that for granted. That's why we come to worship every week: To be reminded that God has given us each other. So, when the going gets hard and taking the high road is challenging; when you are trying to stand tall in a world where it feels like all the grown-ups have gone home, remember: You are not alone.

I think that is what kept Jesus going. He imagined a day when we would be there for each other and he gave everything he had to make it so.