

March 28, 2021 – Mark 11:1-11



Have you ever found it difficult to sleep or you wake up early because of some upcoming event that you can hardly wait for? I have on more than one occasion.

Family celebrations such as birthday parties for a grandchild, milestone anniversaries, weddings, and other times when family is about to gather to celebrate an important event are one of those times I might wake up early.

I also may find it difficult to sleep if there's a work deadline before me. For instance, when Christmas and Holy Week come around every year I have more work than usual with preparing worship services, visiting long-term care homes, and more. Even in this year of pandemic and on-line worship services there is still more work than usual for Sue and I as we prepare to do video recordings of the worship services in each of the three churches we are part of as well as putting the services on-line. It is for that reason that I am writing this sermon at three o'clock in the morning instead of sleeping. I simply cannot stop my mind from thinking about what I need to do in the next week or two and so I decided I might as well get up and get at it.

I wonder whether Jesus and his disciples were able to sleep well in the night before they were about to enter Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast of the Passover? Or did they toss and turn throughout the night in anticipation of the upcoming celebration? The Passover was an important event in the Jewish faith, just as Easter is in the Christian faith today. It appears that Jesus was aware of the events that were to take place in the upcoming week but I'm not sure his disciples were able to see past the celebratory event of what we now call Palm Sunday. Which means Jesus' joy may have been tempered a bit by what lay beyond Palm Sunday but the disciples and followers of Jesus were caught up in the Palm Sunday excitement and didn't think or realize that things might not go as they hoped they would.

I think this may be part of the reason so many people have difficulty sleeping when important events are on the horizon. While they may be excited about the upcoming event, they may also be anxious because they are worried that something might not go as planned or hoped for. Those people preparing the food may be concerned about having enough food and they go through their shopping list in the middle of the night. Those people preparing to be married may be anxious about remembering their wedding vows during the ceremony or giving a speech in front of their family and friends and simply cannot fall asleep or toss and turn the night before the wedding. Those people who are going for a job interview the next day may find it impossible to put their minds to rest no matter how well prepared they are for the interview. Those people who are heading out the next day for a vacation or even a day away from the regular schedule may be up bright and early, eager to get out the door and on the road or to the ski hill or to wherever or whatever they have planned. This inability to fall asleep, stay asleep, or sleep well when we are anticipating the events of the next day is one that is common to most people at some time or

other. There may be different things that trigger this sort of sleepless behaviour but we almost all have something that will do it for us.

I think this is what it must have been like for Jesus' disciples on Palm Sunday, and probably for Jesus as well. Excitement was in the air. Sleep was almost impossible.

Sue and I volunteered yesterday at one of the vaccination clinics in the area and as we welcomed people to the clinic to receive their vaccine shots, I could sense the anticipation in many of the people. I'm not sure whether it was a combination of a bit of anxiety as well as hopefulness but people were looking forward to receiving something that they hope will help keep them safe and help put this pandemic behind us. I know I'm looking forward to getting my own vaccine shot in the near future with the hope and belief that it will help myself and all of us as we limit the spread of the coronavirus until we have enough immunity in the general population to bring the pandemic to an end.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem some two thousand years ago, we can't be sure what he was thinking but we can be fairly certain that his followers were thinking that this man just might be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah who was going to save them. It seems that some of the people thought that Jesus would save them from their Roman oppressors by driving the Romans out of Jerusalem. Other people thought that Jesus would save them from the religious leaders who used their position and authority to place all kinds of religious laws upon the people while not following these same laws themselves as Jesus often spoke out about and against hypocritical religious leaders. Still other people may have thought that Jesus was going to save them from their sins as he often referred to this as his purpose during his ministry. It was this sort of talk that got Jesus on the wrong side of the powerful political and religious leaders in Israel in the first place. It was this belief and hope by so many of the Jewish people that Jesus was the Messiah who would save them that would lead to what happened during the rest of the upcoming week.

I wonder if the reason so many people find it difficult to completely look forward to a celebration, no matter what kind of event it might be, is because of this fear of something going wrong? They might be afraid that there will not be enough food or it won't taste as good as they hope it will. They may be afraid that they will say something wrong or mess up in some way and look foolish in front of their family and friends. They could be afraid that the weather will be lousy or somebody will get sick and the event will have to be postponed or cancelled. They might be afraid of almost anything and everything going wrong depending on how important the celebratory event is for them. It seems that the more we look forward to something and the more important it is to us, the more we may live in fear of it not going the way we want it to. Of course, this is not so for everybody or in all situations. Thank goodness there are times we can look forward to an upcoming celebration with complete confidence and enjoy a wonderful sleep the night before the event.

I wish I was sleeping right now as I write this sermon, and hopefully, when I finish it, I will be able to fall into a deep sleep for at least a short time. It would be great for me if I could learn how to stop my mind from wandering all over the place and thinking of the things I need to do in the next few

days or weeks. Don't misunderstand me, there are nights when I sleep very well. I imagine the same is true for many of you who are reading this sermon. And although I would like to think retirement will help with my sleep because of the reduced responsibilities and work deadlines, I have my doubts about that. I've heard many stories by people who are retired for several or even many years who still have a difficult time getting a good sleep on a regular basis. Maybe it has something to do with our body chemistry and old age.

What I hope you take out of this sermon is that there will always be things to look forward to. Jesus' disciples looked forward to his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as they anticipated his warm welcome and hoped for his upcoming victory. I hope they were not spending too much time, or even any time, thinking that things might soon go terribly wrong, even though that was a distinct possibility. They needed this celebratory event to be just that – a celebration – without worrying about future possibilities.

We all need more Palm Sunday sort of experiences in our lives. We would do well to learn how to live more in the moment and less in the future. We could benefit greatly by putting our fear and anxiety behind or aside in regards to what might or might not happen and enjoy the good things that surround us and that are before us. Doing so could go a long way in saving us from sleepless nights.

I volunteer at a vaccination clinic because I believe that the science is right and the more people we have vaccinated, in particular those who are most vulnerable or in high-risk situations, the more chance humanity has of being saved from this virus. I know that not all people agree with this and they have that right. Regardless of whether people get vaccinated or not, I hope that we can respect and support one another in this time of anxiety and fear. I hope we can do this no matter what situation we find ourselves in or what sort of threat we face.

Remember, Jesus said it is our love of God and for one another that will save us.

