

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Mark 11:1-11

NRSV

Previous chapters tell us that Jesus' journey to Jerusalem has started in Galilee. After reaching Jericho, he and his disciples turn west, passing south of the "Mount of Olives". Both "Bethphage" and "Bethany" were on the slope of the mountain, across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem, so which "village" (v. 2) is intended is unknown.

A vision in Zechariah 9:9 prophesies that a king will come to deliver Israel "humble and riding on a donkey", Jesus borrows "a colt" (a young equine animal, probably a donkey) for his entry into Jerusalem. While Christians later took "The Lord" (v. 3) to be Christ, it is more likely that *the boss* is meant. In v. 6, we read that the two disciples follow Jesus' directions, and are successful. The "leafy branches" in v. 8 are not said to be palm fronds. Fronds were traditional for other festivals, but not for Passover. "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" (V. 9) is from Psalm 118:26. "Hosanna" literally means *save we pray* but here it is a greeting of homage. The crowd seeks, and expects, "the coming kingdom" (v. 10) to be an earthly one, free from Roman control. The "highest heaven" is where God dwells.

To visit the Temple (v. 11) upon arrival in the city is normal, but Jesus does it alone. He has no comment on what the crowd has shouted. His kingdom will be established through rejection, death, and resurrection.

Psalm 118:1-2,19-29

NRSV

Vv. 1-2 are a call to thanksgiving: God's mercy, his "steadfast love", is everlasting. May "Israel" (v. 2) (and) "those who fear the Lord" (v. 4) proclaim this! Vv. 5-13 say that, when the psalmist (possibly the king) was in distress, he "called on the LORD", who heard him. With God on his side, there is nothing to fear; trusting in God is better than trusting in humans. Surrounded by his enemies, "in the name of the LORD I cut them off" (v. 11), with God's help. V. 15 recalls Exodus 15:2a, part of Israel's classic victory song sung by Moses and the Israelites after crossing the Reed (Red) Sea. The "glad songs" are heard in the Temple, the community of the faithful. The psalmist expects to live to old age (v. 17); he will proclaim God's acts of power. He has suffered greatly at God's hands, as a discipline, but God has preserved his life. He seeks entrance to the Temple ("gates of righteousness", v. 19) to give thanks; only the godly may enter therein (v. 20). V. 22, possibly based on an ancient proverb, may speak of the king's rise to power or of his victory. On this day (v. 24) God has either saved his people or punished the ungodly – or both. This is a time for rejoicing. In v. 26, all proclaim he who was "rejected" (v. 22), but is now God's chosen ruler. Note the progression in vv. 26-29: "festal procession", "extol" (raise up), everlasting love.