

Mistaken

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Text: Saint Mark's Gospel 11: 1-11

April 14, 2019 (8:30 a.m. only) Palm Sunday | St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church

We were mistaken. We thought we understood, but we didn't. We thought we knew what messiah meant, but we were wrong. We were mistaken. Why?

We often look back at the disciples of Jesus and ask how they could have gotten things so wrong. The disciples did not lack dedication, certainly. You could make a long list of their virtues. And they walked right beside Jesus for years, knowing him intimately. But for some reason, no matter how often Jesus told them why he had come and what he would do and what would happen to him, they didn't get it.

I think the answer lies in something common to all of us. We can't see what we can't imagine seeing. We often take note only of things that confirm our usual way of understanding the world. Or we see just what we expect, even if it is not there.

Lumped together these are different versions of what we now call perceptual biases. And sometimes it takes a lot to change them, sometimes it takes a radical shock to the system to shake us up enough to help us imagine the previously unimaginable, to hope bigger, even to fear the right things.

The so-called Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem by Jesus and his followers which is memorialized by this day in the Christian calendar represents one of the largest perceptual errors in Christian history. The disciples believed they were on their way to a coronation not a crucifixion. They still hoped for a messiah who would bring political liberation to their people. They feared death as the ultimate penalty. A week later all of these basic understandings of their world will have been upended.

Jesus would be betrayed. Paraded before self-interested and ambitious political figures. Shamed. Scourged. Denied by someone close to him and abandoned by most of the rest. The crowd would call for his head and the Roman occupying force would oblige. When Jesus was laid in the grave a few days after his last arrival in Jerusalem, the understandings, imaginations, and hopes of his followers were buried with him. And when he rose from the dead, their entire way of understanding the world had to change. Hardly any aspect of their understanding escaped death and resurrection. Everything they thought they knew had to be unlearned and relearned in light of Jesus.

Being mistaken proved to be the doorway to new life. In the presence of the risen Christ, their doubts weren't so much proven wrong, as proven obsolete and small-minded. This week, as we walk through the events of the last week of Jesus's earthly ministry, we have the opportunity again to walk beside his mistaken disciples and to discover who it is we follow, and to what end.