

The Scripture readings today put Jesus' passion front and center. It is hard to listen to the betrayal, the pain, the death – but so important for us to ponder. The hosannas of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem seem only an echo. But I want to go back to the gospel that began our Liturgy with Jesus riding a colt into Jerusalem and I want us to think about this question: Why did Jesus leave the temple and go to Bethany? This is a serious question and I think the answer holds the key to our Holy Week this year. Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus borrowed a colt and marched into Jerusalem with people shouting and spread leafy branches in front of Jesus. They rolled out the red carpet. There's excitement because something big is going to happen. Then verse eleven states Jesus enters the temple. Looks around and leaves, going to Bethany. He says nothing. He just leaves for Bethany.

A strange and anticlimactic ending. Jesus is getting out of town. What is this all about? Is there some place else he needed to be? Was he scared? Is he wavering a bit – maybe he has some doubts, some questions and just needed to get away? It is a strange ending to Mark's gospel, and it makes me think there must be something significant here. Mark is the only one of the four gospels that describes this. In Matthew and Luke Jesus overturns the tables and cleans out the temple. In John's gospel Jesus does not even go to the temple he just begins teaching. Mark's gospel is the only one that says Jesus entered the temple, looked around, and left. So why did Jesus leave and go to Bethany? The gospel says that it was because it was already late. So that got me wondering. What if this is about something more than just the time of day? What if Jesus is late getting somewhere or doing something? What might Jesus be late for? I have an idea. I think Jesus was late in getting the colt back to its owner. Why? Well, another unique thing about Mark's gospel is that he is the only one to say that Jesus promised to return the colt to its owner. All the gospels agree that the colt was borrowed but only Mark speaks about Jesus returning the colt. "The Master has need of it and will send it back here at once."

So, what if that is why Jesus left the temple area? Maybe he left so he could keep his promise and follow through on what he said he would do. Maybe this is about Jesus being true to himself and keeping his word...Jesus keeps his word!

What might returning the colt mean for us throughout this week? It is a good image to hold on to. First, what do you need to return this week? What do you need to release or let go of? We all have stuff that we have carried around with us for far too long. It is just baggage we carry that continues to weigh us down. It corrupts our heart. What do you need to return this week? Is it a grudge or resentment? Anger? Fear? Disappointment and regret? Guilt? Envy? Apathy? I do not know what it is for you, but I am convinced that we all have our stuff. Maybe Holy Week is the time to return and release it all to God, trusting that God can do something with this stuff when we were never able to. And what if returning and releasing this stuff is also about returning to ourselves? What if it is about returning to our centers and reclaiming our truest self, that self of beauty and goodness that God created and has loved from the beginning?

So, we begin this week by returning the colt. What do you need to return? Look around at everything – not so much around you as within you. Look at what is missing. Look at what you need, what you feel, who you truly are, and who you want to be. And then return the colt. Returning the colt is how Holy Week begins. Returning to God and ourselves is the promise of how this week will end. Look around at everything and then go return the colt.