

A Dangerous Road!  
Psalm 118:25-29; Mark 11:1-11

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Confirmands, scholars, teachers, mentors, my sisters and brothers in Christ. I would like to begin my remarks with a word of thanks. First to you, family and friends. You encouraged your students, you got them to class on time, you made sure they watched the livestream of the service when they couldn't be here. Thank you for all you have done.

Thank you, mentors. Thank you for being with our confirmands, for encouraging them, being a friend and guide to them, and helping them articulate their faith. Teachers – thank you for your ministry. Thank you for your diligence, your preparation, your time and effort in training our newest members. And thank you for letting me be a part of this class. You have been very kind.

Confirmands, scholars – thank you for letting me share this journey with you. Thank you for your patience, for being kind when I continually forgot your names, and for not rolling your eyes too much when I dogged you about your grammar and spelling. I have enjoyed our time together tremendously.

There were times when our classes were very formal and correct. At other times our classes were more freewheeling. And sometimes they were just a touch strange. But whatever the class or the subject, each had its own particular joy.

And now, today, we come to the end of your training and the beginning of a new phase in your lives, a new road to be travelled. Today you are confirming your personal and spiritual maturity. You are committing yourself to traveling the road of faith. You are committing yourself to taking your rightful place in the life and ministry of our congregation. Congratulations. You have done well. I hope you are proud.

That being said, it is incumbent on me to tell you a hard truth about this new road. The hard truth is this: while this new road can be joyful and glorious, it can also be difficult and even dangerous. There are times when this road is very much like the back of our bulletin. Times when it is more fun than a big parade.

But there are also times when it is a hard, dangerous road. There are times walking this road will make you unpopular. Times it will put you into conflict with friends or family. Times when you will be going against the grain, away from the crowd.

In our New Testament text today, Jesus is entering Jerusalem shortly before the most important Holy Day in the Jewish faith, the feast of Passover, celebrating the Israelite's freedom from their enslavement in Egypt. Jerusalem is a powder keg. One little spark and it will explode.

And here comes Jesus, on a horse<sup>1</sup>, retracing the steps of King David<sup>2</sup>. The crowd is chanting "Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!" If a Roman patrol were to walk by right then, it would only end in swords and bloodshed.

But the crowd is excited. "Hosannah!" "Save us!" Nothing can stop them. They are on their way to a revolution.

And yet, crowds are fickle, turning on a dime. Like a flock of birds, all it takes is a few changing direction and suddenly the whole flock is veering away. All too soon, the crowd shouting "Hosannah" will be shouting "Crucify him!"

The temptation to be one of those birds, changing direction and following the crowd, comes to us all. In ways large and small, before we know it, we are following the crowd shouting "Crucify him." Remember our Prayer of Confession:

*"We shout "Crucify Him" when we seek our own advantage rather than the good of all.*

*"We shout "Crucify Him" when we fail to care for our neighbors as much as we care for ourselves.*

*“We shout “Crucify Him” when we pretend we are wholly responsible for our own success, denying God and what God has done for us.”*

Following the crowd is easy. It's safe. The danger is in refusing to follow the crowd. When we find ourselves refusing to cheat on a test, like all our friends are doing and they are pressuring us to do it, too. When we find ourselves NOT repeating the juicy gossip we heard, even though it seems like everyone is demanding we share it with them. When going out of our way to be friends with the worst player on the team. When deliberately NOT tripping our opponent. That's when the road becomes dangerous.

Do it long enough and we'll find ourselves ignored, ostracized, even shunned. But do it long enough and we'll find ourselves appreciated, respected. Best of all, we'll be pleasing God.

It can be a dangerous road. There probably won't be swords and blood. I doubt if we'll ever face teargas and rubber bullets. But it is a dangerous road because we'll be flying against the flock, going against the grain, rubbing society the wrong way.

What I say to you, confirmands, I say to us all. The road from Palm Sunday leads to a cross and a tomb. But it also leads to resurrection and eternal life.

If you want to stay true to this road, you know what to do. It's what we've been doing in class. Read your Bible and listen to God speaking to you. Pray and ask God to show you how to stay on the right road. Read your devotions and think about how they apply to you. Be active in our church: worshiping God, helping out, taking part. Nothing flashy, nothing showy, nothing dramatic. But do it long enough and it will make a difference.

I promise you; it will make a difference. If we do it faithfully, we will find ourselves loving more faithfully. We will forgive more readily. We will find joy more easily. We will be more content with what we have, and we will have a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life.

What I say to our confirmands I say to us all. Yes, the road of faith can be a dangerous road. But it can also be a glorious road. Yes, we may find ourselves following the crowd shouting “Crucify him.” But if we’ll read our Bibles, pray, worship, and live the life of Jesus, God will lead us back shouting “Hosannah,” and starting a revolution. Thanks be to God.

Again, I have enjoyed my time with you, and I appreciate your attention. I have one more request. I have said what I do is not rocket science. It’s a calling from God, certainly. I feel very strongly that what I do is God’s calling for me. It’s not just a job. But neither is it rocket science.

Yes, I have a lot of specialized training but no more than if you were going to be a lawyer, accountant, or some other profession. And I know each of you is plenty smart enough to one day stand where I am standing. Serving a congregation.

My request is this. One of these days, when I am living in a retirement community, I hope I will get a card from one of you. And I hope it will be an invitation to your ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. It will be a proud and happy day, and I will thank God for it. Just as I thank God for each of you now. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>In Matthew’s and John’s Gospels, Jesus is clearly riding on a donkey. In Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels, Jesus is simply riding a ‘colt’. The nuances of the Greek vernacular lead me to conclude that Mark and Luke mean us to understand that Jesus is riding a horse. ([See Bauer Arndt Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 2nd ed., pg.731.](#))

<sup>2</sup> For Absalom’s revolt, see [2 Samuel 15-19](#). For the Wadi Kidron (Kidron valley, the valley between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem), see [2 Samuel 15:23](#).