

Sermon – April 10, 2022
Pastor Dan Hollis
John 12:12-16

A lot of side-view mirrors on cars always used to have warnings written on them saying, “Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear.” Right? It made for a great moment in Jurassic Park when the T-rex was chasing the car and you could see its teeth getting bigger and bigger in the mirror, with that *helpful* reminder text right underneath. On the other hand, the rock musician Meat Loaf had a *song* titled, “Objects in the Rear-View Mirror May *Appear* Closer Than They *Are*,” which was about how certain formative memories never leave you, and in fact get stronger with age. For today’s sermon, I want to go with the *middle-point* between those two ideas: “Objects in the rear-view may be *clearer* than they *were*.”

I’m talking about the past.

When you’re “in the middle of it” (whatever *it* is), things aren’t always clear, are they? What’s going on? Where am I going? What’s the meaning of this? What *is* the meaning of this? There are moments in life, that we *all* experience, that feel like being... lost in Zach’s Corn Maze here in York.

It’s dark, with twists and turns, it rained the night before and there’s big muddy puddles you’ve gotta deal with; do I choose left or right—okay *now* which do I choose? ...Am I going in circles?

It isn’t until after you’ve made it *out* of those moments—maybe looking back a *while* after—that the path you took starts to make some kind of *sense* to you. That *meaning* starts to become clear. “Objects in the *rear-view* may be clearer than they *were*.”

That’s the benefit of having a Bible that’s youngest part is more than 1900 years old. Sure, the *age* of the Bible brings its fair share of *challenges*, but one *pro* is that we have almost two thousand years of *hindsight* to help us make sense of it. And as a lot of witty sermon titles out there these days remind us... “Hindsight is 20/20.”

Now we may not have enough *distance* from the *year* 2020 just yet. We may not have the benefit of hindsight we need to make sense of everything we’ve been through the last two years... but we’ve definitely been in the middle of *something*, haven’t we? *So* deep in the middle of it, that it’s been *hard* to... make meaning or *find* meaning in the different struggles we’ve each been facing.

We haven’t had the *luxury* to look in the rear-view mirror yet—not fully—because it’s all still too *close*.

The events that we remember today as Holy Week—Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, the crucifixion on Good Friday, and the resurrection of Easter—they were a *lot* to live through. A *lot* to be in the thick of, to be *close* to. The wandering *rural* preacher, Jesus of Nazareth, chose to ride on a lowly donkey into the biggest, most important city in the region—Jerusalem, the city of *God*—and to the disciples' surprise, he was met by *crowds* of people shouting "Hosanna!" *Praising* him, throwing down coats and palm leaves for him, and *celebrating* his arrival.

He came into town, dusty from the road, with no "victories" under his belt, yet these *strangers* were already cheering him like a conquering king! And wait, if he's going to be the great *king* we've been waiting for, why's he riding a little secondhand donkey? And if he's going to *save* us, where are his armies?

And later, during that dark weekend to come... If he was our Messiah, how could he have died?

It wasn't until *after*... that the disciples could look back and make sense out of what had happened. It wasn't until *after* that... Peter could find his courage. That Thomas could find deeper faith. That Mary could find joy again. It wasn't until *after* that the early church could *realize* what the Messiah actually *was*. To really piece it together *what* he was saving them *from*... and *how* he was doing it. Taking the time to *look* in the rear-view mirror... *that's* what made it clear.

So the message of this sermon is two-fold: to offer you comfort in what struggle *you're* going through right now... and to *remind* us *all*—on the other *side* of our struggles—to actually *look* in that rear-view mirror and *find* what meaning we've so desperately needed.

Some say "never look back," but then how can we learn? It may feel easier to toss the memories of our struggles in the trash and never think of them again, and we may need to *do* that for a while for our own health and well-being... but if we don't *eventually* polish that mirror and give a good hard look at the past, then what was the point of going through it in the first place?

In the *thick* of it—in the mist, the maze, the mire... it is often impossible to make any sense, to find any meaning, to fashion any benefit... and that isn't fair. We don't have the birds-eye view, the X-ray vision, or the benefit of hindsight *then*... but you *will*. A moment will come for you, I promise, when you find the clarity of the present cut through the past. When your struggle in the rear-view mirror becomes clearer than it once was.

Will that make everything that happened to you all right? Of course not. But making *meaning* out of your past makes your *present* more clear too... and *that* makes your future an open road.

If Christ can make meaning out of a crowd *first* cheering his arrival, *then* calling for his *death*... if Christ can make meaning out of his own painful *execution*... if Christ can make meaning out of riding a lowly donkey toward the *might* of the most powerful empire on Earth... then Christ can help *you* make meaning out of *anything* you face.

Give it time... and reflect. Amen.