

“Processional”  
By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy  
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29  
Luke 19:28-40  
April 10, 2022

I have a friend who likes to tell stories about going to protests as she was raising her children in the eighties and nineties. She would march for a variety of causes, but especially marched for women’s rights. Once, when her son was still a toddler, she was marching with other women around a large statue, shouting chants and pushing her toddler in a stroller. She circled this statue hundreds of times. Finally, her son looked up from his umbrella stroller and said, “Mom, are we there yet?” And she replied, “Boy, I hope so.”

I often think of this story on Palm Sunday for a couple reasons. Last week we read about the woman pouring expensive perfume over Jesus’ feet, and Judas speaking up, demanding it be sold so the money could be given to the poor. Jesus’ response was “you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.” I suggested that this reminds us that the work of social change and caring for people in the margins is ongoing. In order to do this hard work, we have to rest at Jesus’ feet. We have to conserve our energy for this long-haul job. So sometimes we are that kid in the stroller, looking up at God and asking, “Are we there yet?”

I also think of this story because on Palm Sunday we witness what I believe is more than a parade, but perhaps a march for justice. I’ve become convinced that community organizing is important to the church, as well as to the community. I don’t want to spend a lot of time explaining community organizing, but do want to give you a basic idea of what it is, just because it helps if we’re working with the same definition. Some people might be frightened by community organizing because it sounds political and scary, but at the heart of it, community organizing is connecting people, whether in the church or the community, based on whatever topic they are passionate about to make a positive change in the world. This is something I find incredibly useful in churches. Through conversations and relationships, which I believe faith is based upon, we learn what is most important to someone. For example, I might talk to people who are passionate about food insecurity issues, and they want to make a difference but have never met each other. If I know they are all interested in food insecurity, I can connect them, because we make a bigger difference when we work together. This is possible with any topic.

Community organizing is a great spiritual discipline because it is caught up in the liturgical ritual of gathering, or caucusing with those who are passionate about the same topic and the community, and they go out and meet with people in the community and work towards change. They return to one another, repent of the ways in which they have messed up, and try again. And sometimes they protest or march for justice on their topic, and then they return and continue to build relationships.

Jesus was a community organizer. He reached out to those who were in the margins. He brought them together by telling them he knew a different way - he knew a different way of power, of being a ruler. On Wednesday our symbol was royalty, looking at all the symbols of Jesus as King. He was offering a different kind of monarchy - a different kind of power outside

the oppression of the Roman Empire. The idea of Kingship was deeply tied to the idea of Messiah in Judaism. It was thought that God appointed the monarch, but often they would see that humans were flawed and would mess up. When Jesus came and was considered the Messiah their idea of a King was turned upside down because he ruled with compassion and welcomed those on the margins. So, Jesus gathered those who were sinners, who sought healing, those who were outcasts, and told them a new message -a message of hope and inclusion.

The disciples didn't always understand it. They didn't always grasp it. But they tried. So, here he has been talking about dying for a while, and while the disciples haven't understood, they have been walking toward Jerusalem with him.

The Palm Sunday passage is in all of the Gospels. There are slight differences among them, like how many donkeys he rides, how old the donkey is, etc. The donkey itself is important because a King would have processed into a city on a horse. This was intentional - this was a way to say, "I'm not that kind of king." Imagine - his feet would be dragging the ground on a colt - he would have been uncomfortable - but maybe that is part of the image - that too many rulers live in extravagant comfort and forget the utter discomfort their people live in every day. The people waved palm branches and shouted Hosanna, "Come save us." This was a protest - it was a statement against the Roman Empire and was a way of asking God to intervene. If Jesus knew he was Messiah, he knew his death was imminent. He knew what was coming. He knew this was not going to end well, but this was bigger than him - it was for the care of humanity.

This doesn't have a great ending. We picture parades ending with fireworks, or often Christmas parades end with Santa – Jesus is told to make the protestors stop. He is told to be quiet – because people should be seen, not heard. And Jesus looks at the crowd and says, "I tell you – if these were silent, the stones would shout out." This is how important it is – that even nature would have a say in the injustice.

Sometimes protests look performative. This means that they are all for show and no action is taken. If we know anything, we know Jesus was a person of action. He fed others, healed others, and was with people. This one march was connected to incredible action.

I wonder if you have ever participated in a march or protest. If so, what was that experience like for you? Was it positive? Negative? Both? What did you notice? What did you experience? What were you marching for?

When we march, for whatever cause, we are shouting out, "God, come save us." Come save us from ourselves, from the injustice, from the messes we cause, from the dysfunction of the systems, from the hatred and lack of loving compassion in this broken world. Save us.

Last month my Wabash Pastoral Leadership Cohort talked about justice and we met with a judge and people from the Civil Liberties department and a prison chaplain. That chaplain said that when people looked at the prison system they often would shake their heads and say, "Only a miracle can save this." She looked around the room full of pastors and said, "Well, here we are. Let's get to work." I believe we all are given the gifts and power to make a difference in the world. Here we are – let's get to work.

If you were to march today, what would you march for? What is so important that you would risk your livelihood? I don't know too many people who would be willing to lose their lives over anything other than perhaps their family, and so when I think of that scripture phrase "take up your cross," I like to rephrase it to "What soapbox could you stand on all day?" What are you so passionate about you would argue or fight until there was a change? Maybe another way of thinking about it – if we were to take to the streets right now to make a change, what would you put on a poster board?

We are entering Holy Week. This is a joyful procession on Palm Sunday that leads to death. It is bittersweet - affirming the divinity and Kingship of Christ, while also leading to his death. There are many steps between here and Good Friday and Easter. It is easy to jump beyond this day, to move beyond the discomfort of Good Friday, but Holy Week is a progression. Sit in the discomfort, if you can, and know that even in that discomfort God is at work, sitting with the oppressed, changing systems, and working for the good of humanity. Thanks be to God. Amen.