

Streams of Living Water: Wash Us Clean

A Worship Design Studio Series for Lent—Adapted from Roll Down Justice

Lent 6 March 28, 2021 Trinity UMC

The entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem was a vision of a coming day for which the Jewish people had been waiting for centuries. I'm not sure that we can fully grasp the generations of hope and prayer and expectation that lay behind the cry of the Jerusalem crowd for a savior they had at last discovered in Jesus. Or hoped that they had discovered. The marching crowd that day shows us what it looks like when earthly power is displayed not with military might but through the solidarity, the celebration of all people in the name of love and justice.



In this time of political tensions, cultural disorientation, racial disturbance and revelation of past injustice, perhaps we can imagine a march where we come together as one people who support each other rather than tearing one another down because of our differences. As you listen to this scripture, imagine what it would be like for us to affirm our solidarity with the whole human family, each and all of us beloved and favored by God in our efforts to live in Justice and Noble Obedience.

Scripture Mark 11: 1 – 11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Sermon *The Day is Coming: The Lord Will Guide Us*

Mark's version of this March into Jerusalem is kind of the abbreviated, Reader's Digest reporting of the event. Often the Matthew scripture is read because it goes into more details about the people's reaction to Jesus. You may be familiar with these verses: *When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."*

Luke expands even further, commenting on how the Pharisees tell Jesus to quiet down his disciples so as not to arouse the crowd and Jesus says: 'If these (my disciples) were silent, the stones themselves would be shouting.'

And the Gospel of John adds yet another dimension because those who witnessed Jesus bringing Lazarus back to life were testifying about that miracle, John calls it a sign. 'It was also because they heard that Jesus had performed this sign that the crowd went out to meet him'

So one gospel after another adds layer upon layer of meaning and intensity for the faithful who came to Jerusalem that day for the Holy Days of Passover. This march on Jerusalem wasn't a spontaneous, out of the blue happening. It had been building up for a long, long time and who knew, that this particular Passover celebration of that particular year was going to turn into a joyful, singing, Hosanna in the highest, palm waving kind of a march into the city.

Here in America, we, as a nation, have experienced marches, haven't we? Marches that were put together after years and years of hopes and dreams and discussions and disappointments.

Women marched for the vote in 1913

MLK Jr. 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

2018 A student organized March for our Lives on Washington in response to the Lakeland Florida school shooting by a former student that claimed 17 lives.

Even in 2020, with the pandemic, Black Lives Matter marches in many cities across the country were listed on the front page of the paper.

The list goes on and on.

I have not participated in any of the historic marches in my lifetime but I know people who have and they tell me that there is an incredible energy and joy that comes with participating. Yes, we human beings do come together and march at times...

And Marches can create bonds of fellowship and raise awareness and protest injustice and highlight a better and more noble way to live. Marches are a chance for raising issues that need to be raised and for prompting conversations that need to had and for creating changes that need to be made.

But marches can also turn into riots where violence and destruction of property and injuries and police, even federal government troop involvement raise the intensity level and create social disruption and even chaos. Throughout my lifetime, I have had many conversations with people who are surprised and shocked and dismayed by peaceful protests turning into bloodbaths and firestorms in our cities. In 2020, I heard a lot of people say...that's not who we are as Americans. I don't know who they are and why they are being so awful. More than once I was in conversation with people who said...I kind of understand the issues but I don't agree with the violence. Everybody should just settle down and be reasonable, civilized, proper.

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And what does that have to do with Palm Sunday, you may be asking? Well, it occurs to me that marching in the streets and celebrating and yelling slogans and waving flags and palms—followed closely by violence—that is not a new phenomenon for the human family. That is a human activity that is not unique to America or to Civil Rights or to any Women’s Rights or to any of the other issues that draw people together to protest injustice and to have their voices heard by those who would rather not listen.

No, That movement from demonstration and celebration to violence and lawlessness is exactly what happened that Passover week in Jerusalem. The Parade of Palms, within days, became a classic example of political and religious power mongers, seeking to maintain their control through the manipulation of the truth and the viciousness of false witness for personal gain.

The crowd’s Joy of shouting Hosanna, within days, was replaced by the mass chorus ‘Crucify him. Crucify him.’

A celebration of hopes and dreams realized in this Jesus so quickly turned to a multi-layered, criminalized, systematic torture and death sentence for the one who dared to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey.

I wonder...why are we Christians in America so surprised that the marching in our times, the marching that comes out of long-standing problems and conflict, the marching that starts off honoring a group or an idea or a particular course of action could and does sometimes lead to violence and destruction? If we pay attention to the life and the last days before death of Jesus, we could be the ones to say...No surprise here. Jesus showed us this truth about how we are as humans. That’s what people sometimes do...that’s what religious and political leaders sometimes do. That’s what happens when people are ignored, disrespected and treated as less than. That’s what happens when people feel unheard...they get louder and the yelling turns to cursing turns to pushing, shoving, burning and killing.

That’s exactly why we need Jesus to Guide us. Because there is within our human nature, an inherent capacity for cruel and violent destruction of all that is beautiful and good. And we need the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to bend that capacity in the direction of justice, mercy, kindness and love of our enemies and neighbors so we don’t destroy each other and ourselves.

We need Jesus to show us that violence and destruction are not inevitable. There is a better way...the way of humility, truth, mercy.

And we need Jesus to show us over and over again, not just through this Holy Week, but always, that the evil of death and the cruelty of one against the other is NOT the end of the story. God is powerful enough to step into the messes we create and to bring Resurrection. New life. A new outlook. A new way of living in peace, even with those with whom we disagree.

We as individuals, we as members of The UM Denomination, we as citizens of this great country of ours, we as the children of God, made in God’s image... we need help with all of

that and The day is coming...Jesus will guide us. In fact, the time is at hand and Jesus *IS* guiding us into a better way, the best way, a more truthful and loving way. If we would only pause and listen and follow him. As we move from Palm Sunday into Holy Week, with Maundy Thursday worship and Good Friday reflections, I invite you to think about what we sang at Christmas, as we celebrated Emmanuel: Christ with us, born in that little town of Bethlehem. *Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

The hopes and fears of so many years
And met they were met in Christ. That Christmas night and...several decades later with Jesus and the people of Israel marching into Jerusalem...in celebration of those hopes and fears coming true. Hosanna in the Highest...Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! They could just as well have been saying:

The Day is Coming: The Lord will Guide Us.

The Day is Here: Jesus is Guiding Us.

Yes, Jesus is guiding us to the cross...where the inhumanity of God's children is revealed in all of its ugliness and horror. Only to be met by Jesus with noble obedience, forgiveness, and his cry to God...Father, Into thy hands, I commend my Spirit.

He's guiding us, yes, even in the worst of days and times...Jesus shows us the way. Let us pray:

Guide us, O thou great Jehovah...

Open now the crystal fountain, whence the healing stream doth flow.

We are weak, but thou art mighty; hold us with thy powerful hand.

127 Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah vv.1 and 2 mixed

Cure thy children's warring madness, bend our pride to thy control;

shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.

Grant us wisdom. Grant us courage lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

Lest we miss thy kingdom's goal. Amen.

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