

WGUMC March 20, 2016 "Main Street Manifesto"
Luke 19:28-40

On Wednesday morning I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. I came to church for breakfast to say a sad good-bye to our shelter guests and that felt like a little death. Then I went home, put on my running shoes and drove to a new trail that I've never run before. The John Nicholas trail in Sanborn County Park, just off of Black Road, is a little piece of heaven in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It has everything I need for a trail run: dirt, not too many rocks, shade and water for the dog, and garbage cans for the doggy bags. It also has almost two miles of nearly flat trail and when it does start to go up, it's not too steep. And—praise God—I can't hear the freeway! All I could hear that morning was the gush of streams that hadn't run in a long, long time, coming down from the hills, bringing rainwater from last week's storm. A good breeze was blowing, and I looked up and saw Douglas Fir branches swaying in the sun. The trees seemed to be praising God, so I imagined they were

palm trees waving their branches, and that I was having my own personal palm parade.

The trees made me feel as happy as the people following Jesus on that dirt road to Jerusalem. In Jericho, Jesus meets Zacchaeus, but he continues on. When he gets near Bethany, he borrows a donkey and rides up and over the Mount of Olives. On his way down the other side, as he is approaching the great city of Jerusalem, the whole multitude that has been following him begins to shout their praise and wave their branches.

Still outside the city, they hail Jesus as Messiah because they can get away with it there. Outside the walls and out of earshot of the Roman soldiers guarding them, the crowd is free to sing: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" Outside the walls, they are free to be and to believe and they are happy.

All but some Pharisees who have also joined the parade. They urge Jesus to tell the crowd to pipe down. The soldiers

might hear them. They arrive at the wall that surrounds the city, and Jesus says to those Pharisees, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Now I had always thought of the stones as just rocks along the road. But as I was reading this too familiar story this past week, it occurred to me that the stones Jesus is referring to might be the huge stones that made up those imposing city walls. And I can think of some good reasons why these stones would want to shout out. By no fault of their own, the stones have been drafted into the service of injustice in Jerusalem. These stones make up the walls and buildings that enable the Romans to occupy the city and oppress the people who live there. If I were such a stone, I'd want to shout out for Jesus, too.

When Jesus arrives outside Jerusalem, he surely knows that he is about to go into the belly of the beast. The temple with its corrupt administrators is in the center of the city.

Herod, the puppet king of the Jews, has a palace there. Pilate, the Roman Governor of the province, has arrived for the Passover festival. And because of all the religious pilgrims streaming into the city, many more soldiers are stationed there.

There are so many people and powerbrokers in Jerusalem that everyone can feel the tension in the air. There are rumors of rebellion and the Romans are on high alert for any sign of insurrection. Everyone is acting as if violence might break out at any moment. Because of the very real potential for trouble, the Pharisees want to cancel the parade, just like the rally that was cancelled in Chicago last weekend. But there is a big difference between a political rally and a Jesus parade.

In a normal election year, I would never call out a political candidate. But this isn't a normal election year. And those who want to follow Jesus into Jerusalem have to speak out against the hatemongering, race baiting, women bashing, and excessive name calling that we have heard in this campaign, especially

from one of our candidates for President has been engaging in. Whether you're a Republican or a Democrat or an Independent, it doesn't matter. This is wrong. It is abusive. It is divisive. It is dangerous. I call on Mr. Trump to put a stop to it.

I doubt he will. But if he did fall silent, the stones would not shout for him or any of the candidates. What Jesus brings into the city of Jerusalem is something very different from what we saw in the city of Chicago and what we have seen so far in this campaign. Into a city that is teeming with violence, Jesus comes as the Prince of Peace. Into a city that feeds on political power, Jesus brings spiritual power. Into an atmosphere of hate and fear, Jesus brings love and forgiveness.

The thing that is missing from our politics is the same thing that is missing from too many places and too many people in our world today: love and forgiveness! How on earth did we get here? How did we reach the point where we can no longer get along? Why can't we have civil debates with one

another? Why is it that we no longer have any respect for people who don't agree with us? And why are we so afraid of people who are different from us?

I hope and pray that in the upcoming months, we spend some time contemplating the walls that we have built around us so that we don't have to talk to or interact with anyone who challenges what we think or questions what we believe. The ramifications of these walls are serious. And the stones know that when we wall ourselves off from other people, we wall ourselves off from God.

That's why God sent Jesus: to take down the dividing walls of hostility between us. [Ephesians 2:14] In Jerusalem, a city occupied by the Romans, the walls of corruption and division had grown very tall. When Jesus comes into the city, many are hoping that he will take down the Romans, walls and all. They are looking for a leader like Joshua, who fought the battle of Jericho. Remember that story? He marched his army

around the city for seven days and then called on his priests to take up their trumpets and their rams' horns and blow the walls down.

Maybe it's not a coincidence that Jesus has just come from Jericho. And do you know what his real name is? The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of an Aramaic name that comes from the Hebrew name, *Yehoshua*, or Joshua, which means "God saves."

The people in the crowd that day would have known Jesus by the Aramaic form of "Joshua." And here he is coming from Jericho into Jerusalem to take down the walls. But unlike Joshua, he doesn't bring soldiers; he brings disciples. He doesn't bring trumpets; he brings truth. Nevertheless, he does bring an invading force; however, this force carries no spears or swords. As he makes his way down Main Street, the only weapon he carries is love.

So here is my Main Street Manifesto for Palm Sunday. By the time he gets to Jerusalem, Jesus has brought love to all kinds of saints and sinners, to women and children, to the poor and disabled, to prostitutes and tax collectors. And by going to Jerusalem, knowing the danger there, Jesus shows us how to bring love into any situation: with trust in God and humility, with faith, perseverance, and loads of forgiveness.

Jesus brings forgiveness for those who will arrest him, scourge and crucify him. Following him, we can bring forgiveness to those who have hurt us. Jesus brings hope to people who are poor and oppressed. Following him, we have learned in the last five weeks how we can bring hope to people without homes, jobs, friends or family. Jesus brings healing to those who are physically and spiritually sick. We can bring healing to people with pain that no pill can take away. Jesus brings love to a city ripped apart by politics and power struggles. Following him, we too can bring love to a country

that is being ripped apart by people who have a love of power but do not know the power of love.

If we followed Jesus in every aspect of our lives, bringing love into every situation, that would really be something for the stones to shout about, something for the trees to wave their branches about, something for us to be happy about. This is a trail all of us can take. It has everything we need to run this race. With Jesus in the lead, every step is grace.