

WGUMC March 25, 2018 “The People’s Parade”
Palm Sunday Mark 11:1-11

Yesterday I was at the March for Our Lives in downtown San Jose. And so were a lot of other Methodists and Catholics and Baptists and Episcopalians... There were many thousands of people, including a lot of teenagers and young adults at the march, despite the wind and rain.

I made a sign, because I wanted the other marchers to know that I follow a guy who had something to say about weapons almost 2,000 years before Columbine, before Sandy Hook, before Virginia Tech, before Parkland. The night Jesus was arrested, one of the disciples attacked the slave of the high priest, but Jesus said, “No more of this!” “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” [Luke 22: 51; Matthew 26:52] When it comes to attacks on our schools, we all agree, “No more of this!” So let’s make the Prince of Peace the grand marshal of our parade.

Of course, not everyone at the march was Christian or had any idea why Hank was carrying around a big palm branch. Yet the marchers in yesterday's parade have something in common with the participants in that first palm parade. Way back then, they were marching for their lives, too.

The comparison is not so off-base. The people in Judea were suffering under a Roman military occupation. There was a lot of violence in that country just as there is in this country, and the poor and the marginalized bore the brunt of it then as now. So the men, women and children in the Jesus parade that day were literally marching for their lives.

They were waving leafy branches and laying down their cloaks because Jesus had said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." [Luke 6:20] Because Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." [Mt 11:28]

They were shouting “Hosanna” because Jesus had said, I will give you living water. Drink and you will never thirst again. [John 4:10] Because he said, “I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.” [John 6:35] Because he said, “Your sins are forgiven”; “Your faith has made you well. Go in peace.” Aren’t those the very words that we are longing to hear today?

They called him the Son of David because he was doing all the things the Messiah was supposed to do: bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free. [Luke 4:18] Isn’t this what we need to see happening today?

But Jesus didn’t come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey just because he wanted to make a hard life a little more bearable for people. No, he came up from Bethany because he was anointed by the Spirit of God to give them a new and far more blessed life in the kingdom of God. But when he came as Messiah he was marching to his death. For no one can do what that the Messiah is supposed to

do and get away with it. It's a good thing that the Romans didn't know that putting Jesus to death would be the very thing that would bring us all to life.

The people in the parade didn't know it, either. Or, if they did, they didn't want to believe it, because they loved Jesus. And how on earth do you follow someone, even someone you love, who is marching to his death? No one in the crowd that day had a good answer to that question. No one, except maybe the donkey.

Having been around horses growing up, I've always been puzzled by a seemingly insignificant detail in this story. Jesus specifically chooses a colt, a young donkey, that has never been ridden to make his grand entrance into the city. Now, I trained three horses to saddle back in Montana, and I know that you don't just go up to a beast you've never seen before, throw a cloak on its back, climb up, sit down and not quickly land on the ground. I know this from experience.

I came home from seminary at Christmas one year and my dad wanted me to get on a three-year-old gelding of his. That colt didn't know me from Adam or Eve, and though I had done this several times before, I hadn't been around to do the ground work that you need to do before that first ride. I hadn't gained the horse's trust, so I went back to school a couple of weeks later with two broken wrists.

So, in my mind, while walking on water or feeding the 5,000 is pretty impressive, the miracle that truly amazes me is when Jesus climbed on that untrained donkey and went riding off down the road. All I can say is, he must have been a donkey whisperer, because somehow the colt knew that he could trust Jesus and that he would be safe with him even when the crowd started jumping and shouting and waving branches around. Somehow the donkey knew that it was ok to go with Jesus even though he didn't know where Jesus was going.

If only we could be less like those fearful disciples and more like that little donkey. Instead, we are more like Dad's colt, thinking, "I don't know you, Jesus. Just who are you telling me what to do? Why should I trust you?" And when life crowds in on us and the chaos breaks loose, we panic and buck him off. We head straight back to our old barn where we can hide and feel secure. That barn may be full of comfort food or shopping bags or booze or drugs or video games or any other obsession we could name. Or that barn may be full of locks and alarms and surveillance cameras. Because the world has gone crazy and we are scared and we don't know where to put our trust, too many barns today are full of guns.

Far too many Americans put their trust in firearms. They even want to put them in our churches and in our schools. But as the signs yesterday were saying, "Arms are for hugging." We need "books not bullets" in our schools. We need more God, not more guns in this world. The old song goes, "trust and obey, for there's

no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” And boy do we need Jesus today.

That’s why I thank God that we have some courageous young people who are showing us that there’s another way. It’s not the way of fear but the way of love. And I, for one, want be in their parade. Over the past few weeks, I have listened to these teenagers speak out so forcefully, so passionately, that I could hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

The wolf shall live with the lamb
The leopard shall lie down with the kid
The calf and the lion and the fatling together
And a little child shall lead them. [Isaiah 11:6]

I have to thank the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School for giving us a little glimpse of God’s kingdom. And just in time.

We are coming up on the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. America’s prophet was shot on April 4, Good Friday, 1968. At the time of his death, King and the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference were planning another march on Washington. As part of his Poor People's campaign, a mule train was to begin in Marks, Mississippi, the poorest county in the poorest state in the nation, and go all the way to our nation's capital.

King died but the march didn't. That May some 3,000 people descended on D.C. and set up a shanty town for six weeks. They called it Resurrection City. Though they had lost their leader, they had not lost their faith. Though they saw him die on Good Friday, they were determined to live in the direction of Easter Sunday.

Too many of our young people today have seen their friends die. The *Washington Post* tells us that since Columbine, 187,000 students have been exposed to gun violence at school. Because the adults don't think there is anything we can do to put a stop to it, we have sent our kids down their own *Via Dolorosa*, the way of suffering, that no one but Jesus should ever have to walk. But those kids are choosing to live in the direction of Easter Sunday, and they

need our support. At the very least, they need us to not dash their hope.

The Poor People's Campaign didn't end poverty and the Young People's Campaign probably won't end all school shootings. But if we are faithful enough to follow Jesus, to trust and obey the one who said, "No more of this! Put your sword back in its place," we won't have to go to so many funerals, we won't have to hold so many vigils. Everyone will want to be a part of the parade because we will all know where it's going: to Resurrection City. Keep hope alive. Easter is coming.