

“Parade Options: Waving, or Walking?”

Mark 11:1-11

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

March 25, 2018 (Palm Sunday)

If you want to enjoy a vintage American parade, go to Disneyworld!

A family can choose from the “Festival of Fantasy Parade” at the Magic Kingdom”, or “IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth”, including fireworks, at Epcot Center—or maybe catch both.

On our vacation to Disneyworld, when Danny was a toddler in a stroller, we were navigating Epcot when all the Disney characters paraded by, to the cheers and smiles of the crowd. Like everybody else, the three of us were waving with delight. I got caught up in the fun, and decided to tag along as if we were the last characters in the marching spectacle. I trotted down the middle of the avenue pushing Danny in the stroller. People got a kick out of our spontaneity, crashing the parade like a couple of clowns. One man called from the sidelines: “Ah, look at that grandpa pushing his grandson. Isn’t that cute!” I proudly shouted back: “Grandpa!? I’m his dad!” The man pointed at me: “You the MAN!”

I try to imagine: What would it have been like for Jesus that day, in Jerusalem?

A visit to the ancient city, thirty some years ago, has burned images in my memory: Narrow, cobbled streets; dark, dirty alleys, a maze of dwellings, storefronts, temples; bustling Christians, Muslims, Jews shoulder to shoulder; a virtual zoo of wandering livestock; carts overloaded with produce; a cacophony of music blaring, merchants hawking, children screaming, sheep braying, dogs barking...priests praying. Hidden stairwells led to the path atop the time-worn wall enclosing Old Jerusalem. From above, one can better observe the chaos below.

I try to imagine: What would it have been like for Jesus that day, in Jerusalem?

The tension had been building for weeks. Stories abounded of miraculous change in people's lives. As the crowds grew, it became almost like the birth of a movement sweeping through the public. The authorities felt their control threatened. Some were re-evaluating whether the old ways of governing were still valid, or whether they should fall in with the momentum of the movement. This new leader seemed so humble, and yet so determined. Citizens wondered: Should we be waving from the sidelines, or walking with him?

This is the moment in which I must rely on your trust as a congregation, trust that, I pray, I have earned in our time together. I trust that you expect your preacher to connect the story of our ancient faith with the stories of our contemporary lives.

So, first an apology, then an admission, then an invitation.

I apologize to Ginny and Gail, and to all of you, for not participating in any of the three programs in our Lenten series. Ginny knows that I had previously scheduled conflicts with the first and second sessions. I planned to participate in the third yesterday, until the "March for Our Lives" pulled me in a different direction. I apologize for the choice that I made.

I admit that the experience I had yesterday, as a result of that choice, has caused me to dramatically revise the Palm Sunday sermon I was prepared to preach. You see, there were 800 such demonstrations in America and around the world. Nearly 200 schools in America have been scenes of gun violence since Columbine. That violence in schools has been witnessed by nearly 200,000 students, which would be equal to one of every three people estimated to have been massed in DC yesterday. If you have watched any of the television coverage of the event, you know that the young people's testimonials were each one deeply moving.

None was more powerful than that of Emma Gonzalez, of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Emma was on stage for six minutes and twenty seconds, to demonstrate the

time that it took for a young man with an AK47 to kill 17 peers and teachers of her school family. She stood in tearful silence for the final 4 minutes of her testimony, inviting the massive crowd to join her.

That is my invitation to you. It's about four minutes that would remain in one of my typical sermons. The 17 Parkland victims are listed on an insert in the bulletin. Focus on those names, if you wish, or use the next 4 minutes for your personal thoughts on gun violence in our nation.

(silence for four minutes)

Thank you. Again, I pray that I have not violated your trust, on this memorable Palm Sunday.

I try to imagine: What would it have been like for Jesus yesterday, on Pennsylvania Avenue?

The tension has been building for weeks. Stories abound of miraculous change in people's lives. As the crowds have grown, it becomes almost like the birth of a movement sweeping through the public. The authorities feel their control is threatened. Some are re-evaluating whether the old ways of governing are still valid, or whether they should fall in with the momentum of the movement. These new young leaders, like Jesus, seem so humble, and yet so determined. Citizens wonder: Should we be waving from the sidelines, or walking with them?