

A Time of Marching Together

March 28, 2021 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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Texts: Psalm 118:1-2; Mark 11: 1-11

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

- L: Give thanks to the Lord, for she is good;
her love endures forever.*
- C: **Let Israel say: “Her love endures forever.”***
- L: Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.*
- C: **This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter.***
- L: I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.*
- C: **The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.***
- L: The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.*
- C: **Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success!
Blessed is she who comes in the name of the Lord.***
- L: From the house of the Lord we bless you.
The Lord is God, and she has made her light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festival procession up to the horns of the altar.*
- C: **You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.***
- L: Give thanks to the Lord, for she is good;
her love endures forever.*

Mark 11:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the coming kin-dom of our God!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

*Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.
Here ends the second reading.*

Few words before slideshow:

I want to begin today by showing a slideshow of our marches over the past year. A big thank you to all of you for the wonderful photos and videos.

With a prayerful breath, let us center ourselves now in God's love and all watch together.

After slideshow:

Marching physically distant, but never apart.

I invite us now to extend our hands outwards. To open our hearts. To open ourselves to the Spirit so that she may fill us with her grace. With every breath we take, may we feel that grace – reaching out to the parts of us that need it the most.

Honoring all the many marches we embarked on.

As I put together all of these beautiful photos and videos, I teared up. I sat back in my chair and exhaled WOW. This community is really amazing. (pause)

Here we are now - marching into Holy Week.

For the second time – physically distant. Reaching out to one another across screens. I know it is not easy. I know that now with vaccines there is the hope of regathering on the horizon AND we are notttttt there yet.

Still, we hold our palms high and we hold dear that day Jesus entered into Jerusalem surrounded by excitement... soon to celebrate Passover.

We remember with joy and we remember with the anticipation that his days on this earth are drawing close to an end.

Even knowing what Jesus's future will hold, there is joy. I know I felt that joy marching through Cambridge Commons with you this morning.

And whenever I read this story, especially Mark's account, I imagine a big theatrical production. Jesus Christ Superstar – but next level. Yes, palms raised high into the sky, voices singing... but also groups of people dancing, with maybe a disco ball and some glitter, a long red carpet... with a few fabulous drag queens greeting Jesus.... And Jesus just high enough on his donkey so you can see his face in the middle of it all.

I'll admit some of that I did not get from reading the Gospel. Perhaps this Would have been accurate had Jesus marched into P-town that day.

One of the most powerful parts of this story for me is that he is met with praise and joy in the same city that will soon condemn him and crucify him.

In the other Gospels, Matthew and Luke include some sass and criticism from the crowd -turning to one another asking, “who is this?”. We get a sense that not ALL is good so this transition towards hate is a little less surprising in those gospels.

But, Mark doesn't include that same sass from the crowd as Jesus marches into Jerusalem. And today, that feels important to me.

How can there be so much joy and then so much hate?

This question is partly on my mind because of this past year. It has been a series of roller-coasters. We can see that in the slideshow video recounting our many journeys together.

Loss of our sanctuary, new ways of doing fellowship and worship, BLM protests, creative arts gatherings on Zoom, caring for the most vulnerable in our neighborhood, joy and laughter on prayer walks, virtually holding one another in hard times....

And we know holy week itself will have its ups and downs. There is Palm Sunday, but then as we inch closer to the cross, there is communion, betrayal, condemnation, crucifixion, and more triumph.

But today – today - is a day of hosannas. A day to hold our palms high. Even when we know what the week will bring.

Jesus stepped into a city that would turn its back on him, but he showed up anyway. He did not hold back or turn away. He rides in on a donkey - a donkey that scripture makes clear - no one has ever ridden - a donkey he borrows and returns.

Maybe it was not a glitter roadshow, but he marched in on that donkey with humility and glory.

And the whole crowd praised him and shouted hosanna with joy!

I know it is easy for me to say now 2,000 years later – how could you go from this and then doubt Jesus? How could you follow the rest of the crowd in saying crucify him?

But, if Jesus walked through those doors right now and said -I am the one who comes in the name of the Lord- ... I would have some serious doubts... - even as I stand here at a church. At the pulpit talking about him.

In fact, I probably would not believe him and would try to nicely explain we are not having in person worship yet and walk him right back out that door.

And I bet Jesus Would know that I would doubt him and Would walk through those doors anyway. I bet he would not hold back and would come marching in with palms and an outpouring of love.

No agenda. No expectations. Just with a promise – a promise that he will never stop showing up.

First Church, I think those tears I experienced in reaction to creating our slideshow for today was because I bore witness to Jesus's presence in this community. A community that never stopped showing up. It has been a really hard year for so many reasons on top of everything we are experiencing in our own lives... you could have easily retreated... and you didn't.

I mean I hope you retreated once in a while for restoration...

You learned Zoom. I know that may sound silly now, but that was something most of us did not know how to use. You showed up and you learned. And then You hosted meetings and gatherings. You taught others how to use it.

You learned how to do virtual choir. Peter, Lexi, I am looking at both of you. I never knew something like that could be possible.

You read out loud children's books for our young ones (and let's be honest – adults, too) and then it is on YouTube with 778 views.

You wrote cards. You made phone calls.

No matter how tired you were, you kept showing up. To help, to support, to make this church what it is.

You showed up and you marched forward.

And showing up is not always easy. Sometimes we are anxious because we do not know what to say or do. Sometimes we just want to fix it and make the whole situation better. I know that I can get too into my head and then want to immediately fix things.

When my wife comes home after a hard day – I immediately want to make it all better. Take the hardship and toss it out the window. And she will remind me that - that is not what she needs. She just wants me to listen. She just wants to be sad for that moment or angry. And honestly after a hard day, that is all I want, too.

We are all called to show up. Sure, sometimes it means change, but many times it means simply showing up. Showing up with all that you are – bringing your presence. Opening your heart. Listening with your soul.

This is also means showing up for yourself. Honoring times to rest. Resisting voices that tell you to do more. Letting yourself just be. Trusting God will hold you.

My hope is this morning that the slideshow of our many marches together reminds you that there is a community of people also showing up for and with you.

Each time we all extend our hand to the edges of the Zoom square for a blessing and what feels like to me – a big hug.

Each time we shout Hosanna today - our voices echoing one another.

Through the ups and downs. In the hard times and in the good times. This church – this community of faith - by your side. Maybe physically distant, but never apart.

I want to end with a question I will be asking myself as I enter into Holy Week. A piece that feels missing in my homily today is – how am I showing for God? How are we showing up for God?

For she will keep on showing up for us. As Jesus is denied, betrayed and crucified.

How will we show up for her? How will we be present to her?

When I thought about this, I set my alarm. Here me out. I know me, and I know this week – being Holy Week – will be busy. So, I set an alarm to go off daily at noon to remind me to stop what I am doing. To step outside for a few minutes. Rain or shine. Extend my arms to the side like we did together earlier. Embodying a posture of openness.

Simply showing up. No expectations. No agendas. Just me being me. fully present.

What will you do this week? How will you show up for God?

Prayers and blessings, First Church as we journey together into this week.

