

# The Ultimate Counter-Procession

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish  
 March 24-25, 2018  
 Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday  
 Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 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, 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.

Mark 11:1-11 (NRSV)\*

Grace & Peace to you from Christ, whose counter-procession we follow. Who embodies the alternative. Who is our King of Peace. Amen.

## Move 1: Parade

In Scripture, we read and hear about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Crowds of people line the road in which Jesus is traveling. They begin spreading their blankets on the road. They wave their palms. They celebrate and shout "Hosanna." The hero they expected is here. The hero they wanted is here.

And to bring this scene to life, I'd like to ask for any and all young people to come forward. Young through high school come forward.

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How many of you like parades?

I love parades. Seeing people's creativity. Seeing old, classic cars. Music and bands playing. It's loud. Sometimes there are favorite characters dressed up in costumes.

But my favorite part of parades is the candy. Nothing gets me more excited than catching a piece of candy at a parade that I know I don't need, but the Easter Bunny threw it to me, so I'd be mean not to eat it.

Well, can you do me a favor? Can you throw candy out to all these people? Cheer them up a bit? Get them in a celebration mood like the crowds were in our Gospel story?

Please throw underhand and don't peg anyone in the head. Remember, we aren't people who use language of domination. We use language of peace. Count of three: one, two, three, *throw*.

Thank you to our young people for that. You can go back to your seats. Some of us needed that pick-me-up today.

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## **Move 2: Wrong Words**

My grandfather used to tell me that, to enjoy life, we have to take time to laugh and never be so serious that we can't laugh at ourselves.

Laughter. Celebration. Pausing to enjoy the present moment. These are important in our life as people. In our life as saints, disciples, and followers of Jesus.

I also agree with my grandfather that we all have to be willing to laugh at ourselves when we make a goof.

Well, one of my goofs is that I mispronounce words and don't say phrases correctly. When I do this, my wonderful wife, Kate, likes to point those out to me.

For longer than I am proud to admit, I thought the phrase "play it by *ear*" was "play it by *year*." Not being a musical person, I tell myself that's why.

I always thought that the thing that carries coffee was a *craf*, not a *carafe*. So close.

I'm always missaying song lyrics. I thought the opening of *Lion King* was, "Pennsylvania, I gotta pee in my pants. Ketchup and fries." As you can tell, I'm super cool.

And every time I make a goof, my wife will say, "Ummm, Pat, what did you call it?" And when she says that, I know I made an oops.

I just say it's my secret "Fish" language. I don't adhere to the Man. I don't adhere to the expectations, norms, and limits society places on words.

My wife can poke fun at me all she wants, but she thought Elton John's song "Tiny Dancer" was about "Tony Danza." Takes on a whole different meaning when you sing, "Hold me closer, Tony Danza."

Truthfully, I've always been a challenger of the norms. From simple things—like using my own goofy, unique phrases—to bigger and deeper things about expectations of how we interact in the world.

When I played sports, I never understood coaches who used fear and shame as motivators. When I played football in high school, I didn't get it. When I played lacrosse in college, I didn't get it.

That language of domination. Of power. Of might. Of I am above you, bow to me, don't challenge what I say or do.

That never did it for me.

It's why I love Andrew Luck. For those of you who don't know him, he's an NFL player. He's a quarterback for the Indianapolis Colts. He's a great player.

## **Move 2: Andrew Luck**

Well, Andrew Luck plays a position in which he gets hit a lot. Fast, big dudes are always trying to sack him. Get him before Luck throws it to one of his receivers.

And, you can imagine, the language used in football is brutal and very violent. Domination is the language. Trash talk is a part of the game, as they say. And most people just accept that's the way it is.

Andrew Luck is different. And defensive players explain they don't know how to respond because Luck's language doesn't match what they are used to.

People trash talk Andrew Luck: "I'm going to destroy you." But instead of being silent or spitting venom back, Luck uses language of peace.

When opposing players hit him, he congratulates them. He will regularly compliment the players literally trying to take his head off. "Good play. Great effort, man. You fooled me with that blitz, well done."

And those enemies. Those defensive players are often left speechless. They don't know how to respond! They are taken aback because it doesn't match their expectations. They think you fight domination with domination. But Luck fights domination with peace.

What Luck is doing is challenging the language. Countering the expectations.

It's exactly what Jesus is doing in today's Gospel.

I used to view Jesus' procession into Jerusalem as a parade. As a calm before the storm. As one last hurrah before the awfulness of the cross. As the light before the darkness.

The people and crowds may have viewed this as a celebration event. Their reception of him certainly seems joyful. But Jesus' procession isn't one of celebration.

As scholars Marcus Borg and John Crossan argue, it's one of counter-demonstration. It's one filled with confrontation and challenge. [Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week*]

#### **Move 4: Scripture**

The specific step-by-step details that Jesus gives the two disciples to go to the village ahead and retrieve the colt show this whole entrance into Jerusalem was planned. Christ is very deliberate and calculated in how he plans to enter and arrive into Jerusalem, the religious and political center of Israel.

Everything has been leading up to this moment. Jesus has traveled the countryside and towns. He has set his sights from Galilee to Jerusalem. Now, is the time.

It was the time of Passover. A time of celebration. Of parades. Of parties. The city was packed with people.

I used to think the disciples and Jesus had a certain swagger to them as they were arriving into Jerusalem. All smiles. Holding their heads high.

But we have insight and foresight. We know what is about to happen. The whole world, the whole cosmos is about to turn. The crowds may not have known, but Jesus did. He knew.

As theologian Scott Hoezee argues, the feeling at that moment wasn't elation. It was anxiety. Tension and holding their breath. [Scott Hoezee, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)]

I relate the feeling to the days leading up to when I was going to ask Kate to marry me. I remember how nervous I was. The pit in my stomach. Not sure how things would go.

Think of a big moment you've had in your life. Think of the days leading up to it. That anticipation. That tension. Multiply that feeling by a thousand, and that's what Jesus and his inner circle were feeling.

As Jesus is preparing to enter, there's commotion on the opposing side of the city.

On the western side of Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, arrives. It was customary for Roman authorities to be present during large festivals and celebrations in Jerusalem. They wanted to show that the Roman Empire was in charge and to demonstrate their superiority and power.

As Borg and Crossan point out, Pilate's procession would have been a military procession. One that demonstrated might and power. There would have been chariots, cavalry on horses, soldiers, armor, helmets, and weapons in their procession. [Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week*]

Jesus arrives from the east. On the most unmilitary animal imaginable. He rides on a donkey. He is cheered on by most likely peasants and outsiders. His message is one of peace. He embodies the Kingdom of God. This alternative vision through Jesus now confronts us and is breaking into our world.

This whole scene by Jesus is to counter Pilate. This whole procession is to stand in contrast. From being a King of Power to being a King of Peace.

This entry into Jerusalem is a political counter-demonstration. A religious counter-procession.

### **Move 5: Conclusion**

Jesus stirs the pot, disrupts the power system. He challenges the language of domination. Breaks expectations and the status quo.

And simultaneously he points, directs, reveals, and invites us into God's Kingdom. An alternative vision for the world that God intends for all. That adheres to a language of love, liberation, and life. That seeks peace not power. That builds up rather than tears down. That stands with the poor rather than alienating the poor. That always processes and journeys with the peasants, outsiders, and the neglected in our midst.

Jesus knew the result of confronting the system.

This week, Holy Week, we reflect on that confrontation and ultimately know what it all leads to as well: the cross.

Jesus isn't swayed by the big reception that the crowds give him. He doesn't enter Jerusalem for applause or even for candy.

Jesus came not to be the hero we think we want him to be. He came to be the Savior of the world. The Savior all of us need. To give us everlasting life. And to give us new life NOW by showing us the alternative way. The alternative counter-procession. One centered on the language of peace. One not afraid to challenge the domination language of our world.

This Holy week we reflect on what it means to be people of confrontation.

- March for Our Lives event. 800,000 people marched in D.C.
- 800 cities held rallies yesterday.
- Glen Ellyn was expecting 500. They had over a 1,000 who gathered.
- Thousands gathered in Union Park in Chicago.

These students are modern-day prophets. Disciples living out a call to confront systems of power. Challenging the language of domination. Not staying indifferent but taking

action against violence. Countering violence and guns with rallies centered on peace. On life.

The world may not receive these young people. The power systems will try to write them off. But then we remember we aren't in this world to receive applause and candy.

We don't need to worry ourselves with receptions. We remember that rejection awaits us when we confront power. When we disrupt language. When we challenge systems.

That's what the counter-procession was all about. That's what Jesus' entry was all about.

We remember the irony of today and this week we call Holy. As Scott Hoezee so stoutly states, "It is not our reception of Jesus that results in our salvation. It is through our rejection that we achieve new and everlasting life." [Scott Hoezee, *workingpreacher.org*]

Amen.

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Resources:

Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan, *The Last week*  
Scott Hoezee, *workingpreacher.org*

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