

“A day of parades”

- If I were to ask you imagine a parade, which is the first one to come to mind?
  - Perhaps it is a Christmas parade- they were big ones back in Arkansas
    - The December weather was better there
  - I can remember them in my home town
  - The marching band of Malvern High School would bundle up in long johns, fingerless gloves, and uniforms
  - And we would walk down main street with drum cadences, twirling batons, and marching tunes
  - For Barrington, it would have to be the 4th of July parade, July weather being better here than in Arkansas
  - Or perhaps you thought of the parades of Mardi Gras in New Orleans
  - Maybe even you imagined the Macy’s Day parade in New York
  - There are many more-
  - These parades are celebrations of the way things are: Christmas celebrating Jesus’ birth
  - Mardi Gras a last blow out before Lent
  - And a Thanksgiving Day parade to celebrate a day to remember our blessings
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  - Other parades and processions also come to mind, parades of a different sort
  - The march from Selma to Montgomery, a parade to protest racial inequality, voting rights, and the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson<sup>1</sup>
  - One of my professors and mentors at UCA told me he was in one of those marches, and even had someone spit in his face
  - Or perhaps you remember a parade for women’s equality, either for suffrage many years ago,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie\\_Lee\\_Jackson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie_Lee_Jackson)

- or more recently for equal pay and treatment more recently
- I remember a parade from just about 15 years ago, which took place in Conway, Arkansas
  - The town in which Katy and I went to college and began our married life together
- The first Gay Pride parade in that town
- Katy and I attended, and I even had my DVR record the local news just in case we were on the TV
- What I remember most about that parade was that while we were there,
  - Across town someone out of fear and hate spread manure on the lawn of a local gay couple
  - Their house was only a few blocks from the local Episcopal Church where Katy and I attended
- These parades are parades of how we hope things can be- equality, justice, equal voice and treatment under the law for all
- Parades are powerful events because they carry with them so much meaning and emotion
- Some desiring change or in protest, others celebrating the way things are
- The same was true for the parade, or procession, into Jerusalem which we have just read about
- I bring up these different parades because I want us to consider our Palm Sunday procession in a similar light
- We are reenacting the procession, or parade, Jesus did as he rode the donkey into Jerusalem
- The emotions that we feel regarding the parades of our time are essential in understanding what was happening around Jesus
- It was definitely a day of parades, both of how things were, and the hope of things better
- We are not the first culture to enjoy parades
  - Rome was also known for its spectacular parades, and perhaps even cultures before it
  - In Rome, military parades were a favorite, celebrating a victory in battle
  - When a victorious military commander would return, he would parade through the streets in a ceremony called Rome Triumph<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_triumph](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_triumph)

- Behind him would be the spoils of war: gold, weapons, captured prisoners of war, and even artwork depicting the battles
- It is even recorded by Tertullian that a slave would sit behind the commander and remind whisper in his ear:
  - “Memento Mori”, remember that you are mortal
  - Just to make sure the commander remembered that tomorrow he could be brought down
  - That this amazing and extravagant parade should not go to his head
- Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan suggest that Rome would be having one of its military parades in very close proximity to Jesus’ own procession <sup>3</sup>
- Rome was likely bringing in military reinforcements in preparation for the Passover
- Remember- the Passover was a feast celebrated by Jews to remember their freedom from Egypt
- Yet they were not free- they were not even citizens of the Empire
- Passover meant civil disobedience, unrest, and often violent protest
- The Military demonstrations were to bring in extra fire power, and to remind everyone who was in charge, and why it would remain that way
- Parades, after all, were reserved for the victorious, the conquerors, the powerful
- They were celebrations of how things were.
- Perhaps then we can imagine how Jesus’ procession into Jerusalem would have only added to the tension between him and the ruling authorities
  - While the military was entering Jerusalem with its mighty horses and chariots
  - Jesus rides in on a donkey, a humble animal.
  - For the author of Luke, this was no doubt a poetic moment, with this donkey ride symbolic of the one Mary took to Bethlehem
  - Even more so, this donkey had never been ridden before, seemingly its whole life and purpose building to this exact moment
  - As Jesus rode along, the people put their cloaks in the road as a sign of respect and of making the path easier
  - Our reading of the Gospel of Luke today doesn’t offer many more details, but the gospels of Matthew and Mark give us more

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.episcopalcafe.com/daily/church\\_year/the\\_tensions\\_of\\_palm\\_sunday.php](http://www.episcopalcafe.com/daily/church_year/the_tensions_of_palm_sunday.php)

- It is in their recording of this event that palm branches are spread along the road, forming the basis for our own use of palms today
- Matthew and Mark also record that as Jesus rode by, the people shouted “Hosanna!”
  - “Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord”
- These two parades happening that day in Jerusalem might have brought mixed emotions to the people of the day,
  - much like our own parades
- First, Jesus’ parade seemed to mock Rome and its military
- Jesus had no army- Jesus was not even free himself, yet he was riding in as a victorious commander
- He certainly was no King- yet the people were shouting it
- It had to have been a mix of cynicism, that they would ever be free of Roman rule
- Combined with the frustrations of all oppressed peoples longing for freedom
- With that touch of humor layered on top in the absurd, the crazy nothing-to-lose jubilation that was shown here
- And of course the energy was only building
- This parade would have made anyone associated with Rome a little nervous
- No wonder some of the Pharisees asked Jesus to get the disciples to stop
- They feared it would bring down Rome’s wrath on them!
- Far worse than manure on a lawn, Rome’s punishments were not discriminating- all would suffer.
- This parade was much like some of the ones we mentioned earlier- the ones that march not to celebrate the way things are
- But march because of how we dream they can be. Process towards a vision better than what they see around them.
- When Jesus rode that donkey into Jerusalem, he knew the mixed emotions people would feel
  - Perhaps he was feeling them too
  - For the gospel of Luke, Jerusalem represented Jesus’ death
  - It can easily be argued that this procession assured Jesus’ clash with the authorities and his crucifixion
    - This was the event they could not ignore or tolerate
- Jesus was determined to go forward, even with that very real danger

- Because his ultimate goal was too important
- Jesus was riding towards God's new vision for the world, what he called the kingdom of God
- Where justice, equality, and love reign, rather than the might of an army.
- When we all have unmediated access to our God, our creator, and our salvation
- When our value is seen as intrinsic rather than earned or assigned by birth.
- You see, in Jesus' parade, everyone gets to march
- It's a parade for the downtrodden and the depressed
- The angry and the anxious
- Those without homes, and those with big, hallow homes.
- It is a parade for the sick, the broken, and the invisible and ignored, and those who suffer from being in the public eye.
- For the lonely, the tired, the hopeless,... and for those tired of pretending they are not.
- For those whom the world has told you are worth something **only** because of what you can produce, and only while you produce it
- Those who have tried and failed, and those who cannot not even try.
- And for those whom the world finds worthless, extra, and dispensable.
- It's a parade that crosses time, culture, geography, and politics
- This is God's parade
- March on.

Amen.