

## (Palm/Passion Sunday)

Rev. Scott Marrese-Wheeler  
John 12:12-26 & 19  
“Look, the whole world has gone after him”

“I love a parade, the tramping of feet, I love every beat I hear of a drum. I love a parade, when I hear a band I just want to stand and cheer as they come...” (Harold Arlen)

I do love parades! How about you?

My favorite parade memory was from back in 1976. I was a sophomore in high school. During our community Bicentennial celebration, on a dare, I asked a couple if I could ride in the “rumble seat” of their antique car. They said okay. To the surprise of my friends and parents, I waved as we paraded by them.

Everybody loves a parade.

We hold parades on holidays like the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, or before college bowl games, like the Rose Bowl Parade. We have parades to celebrate great achievements like the Cubs finally winning the World Series or a Ticker Tape Parade honoring astronauts following the Moon Landing. Deerfield and Marshal just had parades to honor their basketball teams. Communities, large and small, have parades as a part of their festivals.

Of course, Emperors, Monarchs, Dictators, and Supreme Leaders have long used to military parades as a way of showing off their “power”. Our President loves this idea, and has asked for a his own military parade. As I said, everybody loves a parade.

Parades are on our minds this morning as we join with Christians around the world in waving our palms and shouting “Hosanna” as together we greet Jesus once more on his entry into Jerusalem.

We might not think of it as a military parade, but for those who welcomed Jesus, waving their palm branches as we have, most certainly was intended as a sign of victory for a new king that would lead his followers to a victory over the Roman Empire.

In reality, this is the type of parade we love to share in each year at the beginning of Holy Week.

But theirs was not the only parade taking place that day. On the other side of Jerusalem, another show of force was parading into town.

**John Dominic Crossan** and **Marcus Borg** in their book, ***The Last Week: A day-by-day Account of Jesus’ Final Week***, remind us that even as Jesus was entering the city, so was the Roman governor Pilate along with an entourage of troops and imperial cavalry to reinforce the city.

According to Borg and Crossan, two major riots had taken place in Jerusalem in the past years at the start of Passover, so each year since then Pilate and his military company rode into Jerusalem in a show of force to deter any possible trouble that might be brewing and keep the peace.

**“Pilate’s procession,”** say Borg and Crossan, **“arriving from the West, symbolized and actualized Roman imperial power.”**

Two different parades into Jerusalem, two different crowds joining in the different processions, two different reasons to cheer the arrival of the star of each one, and both hoping to achieve peace in radically different ways.

As Borg and Crossan point out: **“The contrast is clear: Jesus versus Pilate, the nonviolence of the kingdom of God versus the violence of empire.”**

As we reflect on these two very different parades, we are left to ask which one do we believe will truly lead to a lasting peace among the people: the military might of the imperial forces under the orders of the political leaders or the non-violent teachings of a first century Jewish peasant named Jesus of Nazareth?

But be warned, once we answer that question we must further ask ourselves are we willing to pay the price in seeking the peace that each would offer us?

I suppose you could say both parties will tell you that they demand loyalty, sacrifice, and even your life if we are to achieve a peace in this world.

To get a better understand the cost of attaining peace from a military perspective, we could read or hear the personal stories of the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in what seems like the never-ending-state of war we are fighting.

Each soldier, believing at some level that by their choice to serve their country, peace might be established and war might finally end.

And then there is Jesus’ story. A narrative we know all to well. He too made a choice to go to Jerusalem and there to confront the evils of the system and those who sought to exploit their power over others in the world. His decision also cost him his life.

Both stories have something to teach us about what makes for peace. I suppose you could believe both will truly lead us down the path to peace. As a matter of fact, there are some Christians who will tell you that Jesus has joined with the imperial powers that rule today’s world and that the current war is a divine action in God’s name which in the end will establish God’s peace on earth and in heaven.

I am not one of those Christians.

I believe that Jesus is leading us down one path to peace and the empirical powers of this world are leading us down a different path which is taking us further away from peace.

I like what the late, Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes, had to say about the two parades that we are involved with this day in our lives: **“They love their country, and they love their God; and what do you do when your country is headed where you think your faith and your God don't want you to go?”** (Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes, Patriotism is Not Enough: Christian Conscience in a Time of War, Sojourners magazine, January-February 2003)

This is why I participated in yesterday's **March For Our Lives** parade down State Street as a part of the larger one in Washington D.C. I wanted show my support for the thousands of students who are joining their lives and voices in a powerful, non-violent witness for peace, calling for an end to gun violence and killing.

I know a parade of non-violent people waving signs instead of palm branches, led by high school students and not Jesus, seems pointless and silly to many, if not down right unpatriotic and anti-American to others. But as a follower of Jesus, who is willing to wave a palm branch and shout: “Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” I feel this is the parade I am called to join and the price I may have to pay may indeed be my life.

What about you? Why are you waving a palm branch this morning? And in which parade are you waving it?

Two arrivals, two entrances, two parades for us to reflect on this Palm Sunday. Both of promise us the path to peace.

We stand together this morning with a choice to be made as both a community of faith and as individuals. The choice we must make is which parade we will join our lives and ministry with?

Borg and Crossan remind us: **“Our Christian Lent is about repentance for being in the wrong one and preparation to abandon it for its alternative.”**

As the parade brought him closer to the city, the writer of Luke's Gospel tells, us, Jesus wept over it, saying: “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace.”

I know which parade I am participating in life. How about you?