

WALK WITH JESUS
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Palm / Passion Sunday
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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If you dare,
take the hand of Jesus
and go with him to Jerusalem.
Along the way,
visit friends and challenge power
Turn water into wine
and be extravagant with praise.
For Jesus bids us
live a dangerous love
and, in love,
he leads us along the way.
Amy Mears and April Baker

Matthew 21:1-11

The crowd walking with Jesus toward Jerusalem shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" And the people answered, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Little did they know that Jesus was more than a prophet. He was, as it turns out, the One revealing who we are and what we can be and do.

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In just a couple weeks from now Americans will take to the streets once again to stand up against policies and practices that threaten our nation. Many of our own parishioners are going to those marches.

I'm pretty sure no one will be singing: *I want Jesus to walk with me.* But you could. Or, maybe you could quietly hum it to yourself for, indeed, Jesus walks with you.

Jesus once took to the streets. He had no vote, no political party, no army, and no sword. But he had feet, a voice and a deep trust in the power of love. And so he marched against tyranny inspiring untold others, including Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez, and Martin Luther King, Jr., to stand up against oppressive powers—to walk into the heart of darkness.

This is the beginning of Holy Week. It begins with Palm Sunday, goes through Maundy Thursday, through Good Friday and ends with Easter.

The story is familiar. It begins with a march.

Jesus led a march on the heavily guarded city of Jerusalem, the so-called City of Peace. The night before he wept over Jerusalem, crying out through his tears: *If only you knew the things that make for peace.* He wept because his people had put their trust in violence to save them, including in a god with a reputation for violence against their enemies.

Jesus rode upon a donkey surrounded by a band of children waving palm branches and singing, *Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!* By week's end the god who intervenes to save would be crucified. Three days later, something more powerful would arise to replace that kind of god in the heart of humankind.

The Roman security forces were ready for trouble. It was the week of Passover and Jewish patriotism burned hot.

Passover celebrated liberation from bondage. A thousand years before, God intervened by slaughtering the Egyptian army, or so they believed. Every year since at the Seder meal the Jewish people remembered that god and prayed for another deliverance. One year it was from the Babylonians, another the Greeks, this year the Romans.

Jesus too wanted to deliver his people from bondage. But Jesus understood that bondage is more than political or economic. Bondage is also blindness, blindness to privilege and to the religion of being right.

These days when we march against oppression we must be humble for we ourselves are complicit with that system. Don't think you are so pure or righteous. But march nonetheless.

If you wait for moral perfection you'll never do any good. Stand up for righteousness even if you yourself are not all that righteous.

Jesus could have taken the way of Zealots, those compatriots bearing knives to slit the enemy's throats. It was tempting. Jesus refused that way.

He could have taken the way of the Pharisees and worked on personal piety and purity. It was tempting. Jesus refused that way.

He could have taken the way of the Sadducees and colluded with the Romans to get rich. It was tempting. Jesus refused that way.

He could have taken the way of the monastic Essenes and escaped into the desert to pray and wait for Messiah. It was tempting. Jesus refused that way.

Those ways by other names still tempt us.

Jesus walked another way—the way of dangerous love. He would challenge the oppressors with non-violent resistance and confrontation. He would love his enemy even if it killed him.

So on what we call Palm Sunday, Jesus took the road well traveled into Jerusalem but he took a way less traveled. He upset the moneychanger's table and thereby upset the powers that exploited the poor.

Four days later in an upper room he upset the Passover ritual meal. He took the Seder bread and blessed it. He took the wine and poured it. But there was no recitation of how a warrior god had intervened to deliver his people from Egypt. There was no "remember that." Instead it was "remember me."

This is my body. I am one with the grain that grows from the earth. *This is my blood.* I am one with the blood that pours from the grape. I am bread. I am wine. I am one with all that is. I am one with you. We are different yet we are one.

Remember this. Remember me.

Now we may hear this as the voice of Jesus of Nazareth but we can also hear it as another voice. It's the voice with the word by which time and life began. *In the beginning was the word.* And that word is love. We hear it in the voice of Jesus. We see it in his life.

Remember me.

Do you remember, he might have asked, when the religious leaders asked me to judge a blind man excluded from society as a defective sinner? Do you remember how I turned the tables on them? It was they who excluded others who were the real sinners because they claimed to see, they claimed to be right but they were willfully blind.

The real sin, as it turns out, is to refuse to see that we are all one. Love does not exclude. Love welcomes all.

Remember that. Remember me.

And remember this. When they come to take my life, I will not count on god to save me. That god will forsake me. I will count on love and forgiveness to save me and the whole world. Yes, it's a dangerous love. But it's the only way to walk. After all, love is the way, the truth and the life.

Remember me. Re-member me. Re-member my broken body.

Re-member the broken and dismembered world with love. May it and we be whole as we and all things were meant to be from the beginning.

That is my kingdom. A kingdom of love and universal kinship.

Remember that. And remember this: I will never leave you or forsake. I will walk with you forever.