

Rev Rita Message March 28 2021

I love a parade! Growing up in Regina, exhibition week meant a Children's Day Parade on the Monday and the Travelers' Day on the Friday. And then, a summer road trip to Moose Jaw might mean you got to watch the Band Parade marching down the 'Golden Mile'. On TV, there was always the Toronto Santa Claus Parade and, of course, the Calgary Stampede Parade. What a thrill it was when I moved to Toronto for theological studies that I lived just a few blocks from the Santa Claus Parade. And then, to end up living where the Stampede Parade took place. Well, the only thing better was the Airdrie Canada Day Parade.

In the Scripture reading, we find ourselves in another parade as Jesus makes his way into Jerusalem. But, as Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan note in their book: *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem*, Jesus's parade wasn't the only one that was taking place in the city that day. Every year on Passover, pilgrims would flock to Jerusalem to worship and remember. This Passover celebration was a time when the Jewish people celebrated the ways that their God had delivered and liberated them from the oppressive Egyptian empire long ago. Because the Romans knew what the celebration marked, So, moving up from Caesarea Maritima from the West, Pilate processed into Jerusalem through the largest gate, the Western Gate, riding on a war horse with calvary, soldiers, banners and troops marching behind him. The streets were cleared and large crowds gathered to watch the display. And none of the pilgrims who had gathered to worship in Jerusalem could miss the point being made: their celebration of the Passover was only happening at the tolerant pleasure of the Roman government. On the other side of town, another, more rag-tag procession had begun. Jesus rode a colt down the Mount of Olives on the East side of the city, surrounded by a crowd of followers. They spread their cloaks and palm branches ahead of him. Small children were lifted up onto the shoulders of their parents as they greeted him with shouts of "Hosanna" and the treasonous chant, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor, David!"

You see, "Hosanna" is no simple cheer. It is a prayer and a plea. And it paves the way for what will come. For Palm Sunday is a day of contrasts as we are confronted with the choice between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar. We recognize, on this day, that this contrast is central to the story of Jesus's life and to our understanding of the Gospel. As Borg and Crossan note, "The confrontation between these two kingdoms continues through the last week of Jesus's life. As we all know, [this week will end with] Jesus's execution by the powers who ruled his world. Holy Week is the story of this confrontation." 2 And Palm Sunday is its beginning

As the Rev Dr Kristen Adkins-Whitesides from First Baptist Church in Winchester, Virginia points out in a Palm Sunday sermon: Two processions made their way into Jerusalem that day. And, as

those who seek to be faithful to Jesus today, we are forced to ask ourselves: Which parade are we a part of? As we move through this week, we try to commit ourselves to the way of Jesus. We try to join the band of followers with their palms and their cloaks, their pleas and their prayers. But we know that this will not be an easy road. Like those first followers of Jesus, we don't always know where the path of discipleship will lead us

I don't know when we will be able to gather in a crowd to watch a parade go by. And I don't know when we will be able to safely parade up to that little white church by the rails for worship with a side of coffee and conversation.

But this I do know. Palm Sunday reminds us that despair and hope will travel together on this road. We will despair at the brokenness of our world and of our lives. And we will place our hope in the one who travels alongside us. The one who leads us onwards in this strange parade. "Hosanna!" we cry. "Save us!" we pray.

And then, picking up our cloaks and our crosses, we make our way behind Jesus. Knowing that he already has traveled this road before. And he knows how to lead us in this parade as we move from pain to praise, from suffering to salvation, from death to life everlasting.