

"Marching with Christ"
Rev. Ben Heimach-Snipes
Morgan Park Presbyterian Church

Psalm 118
Mark 11:1-11

Were you there today? Were you there today to celebrate Jesus? Oh my gosh! What a crazy street party! I mean, we have been following Jesus around for years now, and even when he has a crowd of thousands, he told us to keep quiet and not talk about his identity. It did take us longer than he expected to figure out it was true, but once we believed he was the Messiah, we had to keep it a secret!

Then today, everything changed.

When my brother John and I asked Jesus to let us sit at his right and at his left in glory, he told us we had no idea what we were talking about. But then this morning, he asked us to go get the very colt that he would ride into Jerusalem to start this revolution! Sounds like a job for your right hand man if you ask me! We darted off as quick as we could to grab that beloved creature!

One thing is for sure - Jesus is organized. We hadn't been in the villages outside Jerusalem for months, and yet, as the cock crows, there was the colt tied outside someone's home, just as Jesus had told us. I mean, maybe we had been there before, but when we told the people there that we were taking the colt for Jesus, I was so scared, I could barely get the words out. It was awkward walking up to them as if I knew what was going on. But they were totally on board! Not only that, but almost the whole village followed us back to Jesus to join in the march.

When we got back to the Mount of Olives where we were organizing the march, you could see people gathered from every village we had visited in the region in the last three years! It was huge!

It reminded me of the military procession that we watched when Pilate first came to Jerusalem. The macho military commander - all decked out in armor, glitz and glamour - riding in on his military horse as if he had won some major battle to get here. The mount of olives is where OUR people have always gathered to cheer on our heroes and kings coming back victorious to Jerusalem.

We haven't had a victory in a long time now, and I believe, as Jesus taught us, that no victory can come from the use of violence. So, instead of a military steed, our Prince of Peace climbed on top of our little colt, with his feet still touching the ground! It was a beautiful mockery of the violent military colt that rules all of the Mediterranean. And instead of weapons, we had the holy Spirit. We worshiped Jesus - not Caesar - not the powers that be! It got everyone in a frenzy - in a sort of Carnival Spirit.

But did I mention that Jesus was organized? All these people from all over the region had come up to march with us, and they brought palm branches with them from the fields along their journey to the Mount of Olives. They knew this was a celebration of victory - of triumph over evil. Jesus said this is a triumph over death!

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It surely felt like a triumph over death. Not a single person died today, even as we marched in protest of the violence of the empire, the violence of our own people coopted into the systems of oppression that keep the wine and olive oil flowing to Rome.

After Jesus prayed for the crowds gathered at the Mount of Olives, Peter shared the plan with everyone of how we would march through the capital. The cheers began to fill the streets as we moved into Jerusalem. Thousands of people laid down their cloaks in the street for Jesus to pass by. The crowds that waved their palm branches laid them down in the street as well, just as they did for the heroes of our ancestors who returned victorious.

The people were shouting, "Hosanna!" or in English, "Savior, rescuer!" God has called us to march for what we believe - to march for peace - to march for life - to march for a savior that we believe in! We have been so careful to avoid calling Jesus the Messiah in public for months, and now suddenly we are worshiping him like a king in the absolute center of the Jewish Kingdom!

It is hilarious and really powerful to me that Jesus paraded into Jerusalem on this tiny colt. The Roman guards were furious - demanding that we stop mocking Caesar and Pilate and even Herod! Just the other day, Jesus was critiquing these tyrants and saying, "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave to all."

We marched right by the guards, shouting, "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!" It was an outright spectacle!

Another word for all you English speakers here in Bethany today - "His steadfast love endures forever." If we are going to be shouting all these quotes from Psalm 118, we might as well get to this one. "The Hebrew root of 'steadfast love' is a mother's womb - God's strong, compassionate, fiercely steadfast love. This is pretty countercultural for the psalmist, and still for us. Instead of praying to the angry gods of Greece who really only had apathy for their human worshipers, our God is a god of a mother's nurturing, creating, abundant and constant love.

In Jesus, we are praising a God who has liberated us and will continue to liberate us from every struggle and chain that comes to bind us. As we marched together with Jesus today, I could see the chains falling from people's hearts. I could see freedom being realized in us in new ways as we began to truly believe in the Kingdom of God that Jesus had been teaching. We could embody this in our community!

And did I mention that the children were leading the way? Just the other day Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." The children marched with us without any question as to what was right. They have seen violence and despair, they have mourned friends and neighbors, and they have had their voices ignored by those in power for long enough. So we followed them to the temple. Jesus

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not only blessed them, but he had us look to them as an example of how to live in God's kingdom.

You're right. This is getting political. This is getting dangerous. This is becoming a peace-filled revolution of the soul! What inspired you to come? What is it that gave you the courage to risk everything to walk with Jesus? What is it that you couldn't live without?

God has called us to march for what we believe - to march for peace - to march for life - to march for a savior that we believe in - a savior that continues to liberate us! And then to serve as Jesus serves.

Amen