

259 The Big Parade

(Note: This blog entry is based on the text "The Big Parade", originally shared on March 29, 2023. It was the 259th video for our YouTube Channel, Streams of Living Water (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7KnYS1bpHKaL2OseQWCnw>), co-produced with my wife, Rev. Sally Welch.)

Do you like parades? There are two parades that have shaped our lives forever. And one that will. Today, we're going to find out what they are.

We've had a lot of rain this season, and a lot of snow in the mountains, and more is coming! We should see a clear day for Palm Sunday this weekend, just in time for the processions and parades.

I'm sure you seen parades. Have you ever been in a parade? Have you ever seen a parade that started because people were so excited that the whole community was in a turmoil? Today, you will.

I love a parade! Especially one with marching bands. They are why I started playing drums.

I remember watching the Memorial Day Parade in my hometown, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, as a child. I remember standing at the curb, hearing the rumble of the percussion coming closer and closer, and my excitement growing.

I remember the thumps on my chest as it drew nearer, the staccato pulse of the snare drums, the crash of the cymbals and the massive thud of the big bass drums.

I wanted to do that!

I tapped out rhythms on every surface I found in front of me for years. Actually, I still do. 😊

I made my own drums out of empty cardboard boxes, Quaker Oats containers, my legs, whatever I could find. I destroyed the child's drum set my parents bought me for Christmas when I was in 5th Grade playing "Rock Around the Clock".

I played a violin for a year because our school system started its orchestra program a year before its band program, and I thought it would help me learn to read music. When I couldn't play drums because I didn't own a concert snare drum, I played mellophone (a French horn with trumpet valves) for a summer until my dad talked with the high school band director, who sold him a surplus used drum from the high school band.

I started practicing on a practice pad and played that snare drum. I moved immediately into first chair and staying there for four years, all the way through high school. I still have that drum.

I became **that guy** who played the drums, marching down the street in the parade.

When I chipped my left wrist vaulting over a "horse" in gym class, I wore a groove into the cast and played in the parade anyway.

I saved up and bought a Ludwig "Super Classic" drum set with the silver sparkle finish, just like Joe Morello's, the drummer with The Dave Brubeck quartet.

I took it to college and played in jazz bands through college and seminary and beyond.

And it all started with a parade.

Parades bring people together, whether they are in the parade or watching it. They create a sense of focus and a common experience, even a common cause.

That brings us to the first parade: Jesus entered Jerusalem, once, at the head of a parade. He would be dead in a few days, but for that shining moment he brought people together, at least some of the people anyway. He knew he would die there, but he rode into town like a champ.

Here's what happened, in **Matthew 21:1-11**

¹When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." ⁴This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵"Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

I don't know that there were any bands in that parade, but I imagine small children watching, running along with it on the sides. Caught up in the excitement, finding branches to throw in his donkey's path. Asking their parents if they could throw their outer clothing onto the path for Jesus's donkey, like some of the adults were doing, and hearing a firm, "No".

I imagine that it was exciting, but that it was also kind of scary. Who were these people? Crowds can become mobs, and mobs can go out of control, they can get destructive.

But here he came, Jesus. The Messiah? The one they had been awaiting for 1,000 years? A deliverer, but from what? Deliverance from the Roman empire's army of occupation (the empire threw palm branches to greet successful military leaders)? Something else?

Was the excitement contagious, or did many look on with horror, or indifference?

How did Jesus feel, riding into Jerusalem like that? What did he think about the cheers of the crowds?

We are only a little more than two months away from the mass shooting at the Star Dance Ballroom in Monterey Park on the night before the Lunar New Year. Two months and fewer than two weeks. Doesn't it seem like a lot more time has gone by?

It's hard to put a finger on what has changed. I have attended vigils. I have lit candles out in the memorials. Sally and I and the congregation that I am currently serving there have contributed money to a fund for all those whose lives were utterly changed that night, as have the lives of many of the members of the Monterey Park community.

And yet, life goes on. The TV station crews don't come out as much; there's not much news. The memorials and the candles are gone. Unless you were immediately affected, it is starting to become an abstraction.

I remember standing at one of the vigils and hearing a young woman say to her friend, with perhaps a bit too much cynicism, "We were once the model minority. So much for that."

The shootings at the Christian school near Nashville this past week was the 127th mass shooting in the United States, **this year!** The same things were said, and the same things don't seem to get done.

Jesus knew what was about to happen. He knew about the deadly violence that he was about to experience.

I wonder if Jesus felt a momentary urge to just end the chain of events that he knew was coming, right there. To just stop with the cheers and spend the rest of his life as a popular rabbi, a miracle worker.

But he didn't.

Someone posted a poem on a Facebook page for Lutheran pastors the other day that began,

"We want the war horse

Jesus rides a donkey"

In Jesus' physical time on earth kings rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, not a war horse, to show that they came in peace. Palm branches were waved as a sign of goodness and victory.

Why did Jesus ride into town on a donkey? Was it a conscious reference to the Old Testament prophecy, as we read in **Zechariah 9:9?**,

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

*humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

I think that he had a particular kind of triumph and victory in mind.

He chose to ride a donkey as a symbol of humble service: death on the cross, because he resisted the temptation to take the easy way.

He got that donkey when the disciples just went and untied it and, when the owners asked them to explain, they said "The Lord needs it". And they said, "OK"!

Either I'm missing something here, or it was another world back then.

Did they know about Jesus? Was he that respected, that popular?

The Bible says that a "multitude" of his disciples began to loudly praise God. Right there. In broad daylight. In public. It says that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil. What would it take to put in turmoil a whole city with an estimated population of 55,000 under normal circumstances, and 180,000 (some estimates go much higher) during major festivals like Passover, which was going on when Jesus was crucified?

It's easy to follow Jesus when he's there at the head of the parade. Top of the charts.

It's harder when he's headed to the top of the cross.

That brings us to the second parade, the parade of Jesus to the cross. The governor's soldiers humiliated and tortured Jesus. Then this happens in **Matthew 27:31-37**,

³¹ After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

³² As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; ³⁶ then they sat down there and kept watch over him. ³⁷ Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Do you know how many of the "multitude" who were in or who watched the Palm Sunday parade followed Jesus all the way to the cross?

Zero. The power of that parade, the one we celebrate as "Palm Sunday", was very temporary. Jesus knew that.

His humble service would change everything. It would lead to the salvation of all who put their trust in Jesus to save them and live for others in response to the sacrificial love of God in Jesus Christ. But that's a story for next week, a week of love and shame. Holy Week.

It's also a story that doesn't end with Holy Week. In fact, it comes not to its end but to its beginning, much later.

That brings us to the third parade, the parade of those who are in the end being saved through faith by Jesus Christ for all eternity. The parade of the multitudes who do not desert Jesus at the end, but who are received into his perfect presence forever.

We get a glimpse, in **Revelation 7:9-10**,

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

"Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Salvation belongs to God and God gives it to all who receive it in faith, in a living relationship with the one true living God that transforms lives.

Earlier I said that no one does anything about mass shootings, but that is not quite accurate. **We** do.

We provide the communities we serve with the sense of connection and transcendence that our culture so desperately needs. We live by it, we offer it, we communicate it, and we grow by invitation to it. We serve others in response to it.

That is the gift of God in Jesus Christ shown to us **in three parades**, the one where Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem, the one where Jesus goes to be the only acceptable sacrifice for the sins of humanity, and the big one, the big parade, the one where we receive the gift of God in faith and in trust in Jesus as our only savior, and are drawn to him forever.

Share that good news.