

I Love A Parade
Palm Sunday
March 28, 2010
Steven M Conger

(Matthew 21:1-11 NRSV) When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, {2} saying 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. {3} If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." {4} This 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." {6} The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; {7} they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. {8} A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. {9} The 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!" {10} When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" {11} The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

I think that this is one of my favorite Sundays in the year.
It starts with a giant parade!
And who doesn't love a parade!

When Duke or Butler wins the National title next week --- wouldn't you like to be there for the parade?

The Butler Team arrived back to Hinkle Fieldhouse at 1am this morning to a huge crowd and celebration. It was a parade welcoming the West Region victors back home.

Or what about when the Cubs win the World Series this fall --- you can bet that I will be there!

Any of you going to join me?

And think of the parade that we hold here in town every year.
We even participate in that parade ---- the annual 4th of July parade.

And why do we love parades so much?

What is it about every parade that attracts us so?

We love parades because we love celebrating with WINNERS!

Whether it is our favorite sports team, or our country → we love parades because that means you are a winner!

Do you think that there was a parade in Lawrence Kansas last week when the University of Kansas lost in the second round of the NCAA basketball tournament?

You would think that there should have been.

They were the #1 overall seed in the tournament.

Ranked #1 in the country

The won 33 games in the country with only 3 losses

But there wasn't one

Just like there won't be a parade for the Kansas State team or for the University of Kentucky team who also lost yesterday.

Parades are for winners

Parades are for champions

And that is why most of us love parades!

This evening, in the town in Mexico that my parents are visiting, there will be a huge parade → celebrating Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem. My dad told me that it is one of the biggest events in the town.

2000 years ago, Jesus and his rag tag followers crossed over at Bethany and started the descent into the Kidron valley and up the hill on the other side into Jerusalem.

Matthew tells us the story this way:

¹⁻³When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: "Go over to the village across from you. You'll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, say, 'The Master needs them!' He will send them with you."

⁴⁻⁵This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet:

Tell Zion's daughter,
"Look, your king's on his way,
poised and ready, mounted
On a donkey, on a colt,
foal of a pack animal."

⁶⁻⁹The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, "Hosanna to David's son!" "Blessed is he who comes in God's name!" "Hosanna in highest heaven!"

¹⁰As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, "What's going on here? Who is this?"

¹¹The parade crowd answered, "This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee."

It was a parade, a huge celebration for the winner Jesus who was coming into town and would kick out those evil horrible Romans, and the Jews who were in cahoots with them.

The way Matthew tells the story, the whole town came out to greet Jesus and his followers.

They were so excited at the prospect of his getting rid of the Romans that they were busy waving Palm Branches.

And we say → gee that is nice that they were waving palm branches.

But that was a really dangerous and subversive thing to do.

That was kind of like me wearing my Duke shirt when Kevin Mybeck and I went to Mackey Arena at Purdue for the Duke vs Purdue game last year.

I got lots of dirty looks and was seen as the enemy by many of the Boiler faithful.

The Palm Branch was a nationalistic symbol for the Jews, so to pull it out and wave it at a parade was making a very clear statement to the Roman authorities.

They believed that Jesus was the ONE

The one who was going to overthrow Rome and establish a Jewish nation once again.

Jesus was a winner.

But, unfortunately our story doesn't end there.

Jesus disappoints all those who had gathered on Sunday for the parade welcoming him into town.

By the end of the week he had angered and disappointed every constituent group in town

They decided that maybe he isn't the one, after all.

And before the week is over, another parade begins to form.

And once again, people come out to celebrate with the victors.

But this time the victors were Rome, and it was a parade through the streets of Jerusalem out to a hill where Rome would crucify their political prisoners.

The crowd that on Sunday was shouting hosanna was now shouting crucify him.

And we scratch our heads and wonder how could that happen

How could people shout hosanna one day and crucify him the next

But should we be so surprised.

We shout for our team one minute, but when they disappoint us – when they fail us – often we turn on them – wanting somebody to pay for our disappointment

Jesus came preaching a message that the crowd miss interpreted.

They thought they Jesus had come for **just them** and no one else.

But when he began preaching about caring for our brothers and sisters, caring for the widow and the orphan, making sure that nobody falls through the cracks of society --- they decided they didn't like that message too well.

Maybe he wasn't the ONE after all

And so they turned on him

When he wasn't willing to champion **their causes, their agenda**, they no longer were interested in him.

Part of our challenge in 2010 is to recognize which parade we are at.

Are we at the Palm Sunday Parade worshipping a messiah that we have created in our image.

Are we at the Good Friday Parade, filled with hatred and disillusioned and just wanting to get rid of the do gooder and any cost.

Or are we at Jesus' parade → a parade that takes us to the soup kitchen, the free clinic and the orphanage reaching out to heal God's children.

As long as we continue to wander in the wilderness, we cannot even recognize the parade we are attending.

But God invites us to come out of the wilderness

To abandon our self-deception
 Desire to place blame
 Unfulfilled promises and commitments
 Arrogance
 Misplaced priorities
 False messiahs

And join the parade of making a difference in the world

A parade that understands what God expects of each of us:

(Micah 6:8 NRSV) What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?