



Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Lockett Currie

PALM SUNDAY DIALOGUE

April 17, 2011

**adapted by Pastor Barbara from “On Parade with Jesus”,
written by Rev. Mary Luti and Rev. Daniel Smith and
performed at First Congregational Church, UCC, in Cambridge, MA
on March 16, 2008**

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there; untie it and bring it to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’ And he will send it immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying “Tell the daughter of Zion, look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a young colt, the foal of a donkey.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the animal to him, and put their cloaks over its back, and he sat on it.

A disciple speaks:

‘Bring me a donkey,’ he said to us. A donkey? I stared at him. ‘Jesus, you can’t afford a donkey. You don’t have any money. You don’t have a house. You don’t have even a change of clothes. And you want a donkey?’

‘It’ll be tied up in the village’ he said calmly. ‘Untie it and bring it to me. If anybody asks you what you’re doing, just tell them I need it.’

It was like that with him. He did the strangest things. Sometimes it was too much. It was like he was forcing you to choose. You could walk away from him, and many of us did. Or you could take one more step on the road with him and hope it would lead somewhere. Where? We hoped it was to that realm of peace he kept talking about. We never knew who was making the riskier choice, the ones who stayed or the ones who left.



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Anyway, Jesus was waiting. So I shrugged. Made my choice. Again.

‘Okay,’ I said.

On the way to the village we practiced our lines – ‘Hey, nice donkey, Mister. We’ll just untie it and take it away now. No, no, really, it’s okay, we know it’s your donkey, but Jesus needs it.’

Turned out we didn’t need to say anything. The donkey was there, with nobody minding it. That was a relief.

But bringing the donkey back to Jesus, I remember wondering, ‘Why does he need a donkey? He always walks everywhere. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him mounted. Why now?’

Much later, his mother Mary reminded me that he had indeed ridden a donkey once when he was a baby. When she and Joseph ran away with him to Egypt to protect him from King Herod. You’ve seen the paintings – Joseph leading the animal, Mary on its back with the child wrapped safe in her arms...

People say that Jesus rode a donkey that riotous day in Jerusalem as a sign of his peaceful intentions. As a way of saying that he was a different kind of king. And it’s true – he never wanted to be a conquering hero. He believed meekness was more powerful than violence. But after Mary reminded me about the flight into Egypt so many years before, I wondered if maybe Jesus was thinking about that time too.

Maybe in the midst of all the street theatre, all the dizzy cheering, he was thinking that this time, on this journey, on the back of this donkey, there’d be no refuge at the journey’s end. This time no angel-dream would save him, no mother would keep him warm against her breast, no father would protect him from the tyrants. This time he wouldn’t ride away from danger, he would ride straight in to meet it, head on, face to face.



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I remember bringing him that donkey...I remember handing him over...Knowing what I know now, I would do it again.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the tress and spread them on the road. 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!”

A person in the crowd speaks:

I was there, too. I saw the crowds – they gathered so quickly, it was like a burst of energy overtook the city. One moment, it was just a road. The next there were dozens, hundreds of people coming from all directions.

And the talk! They were practically buzzing, sharing the scraps of knowledge they had about this man, Jesus, who was entering the city on a donkey. Their stories about him...they were almost unbelievable. Some said he performed miracles! Giving sight to a blind man? Straightening an old woman’s crooked back? Turning ordinary water into wine? How was this possible?

And then there were the teachings...they said he described a new way of knowing God and seeing God’s love for us. He was asking people to follow him on a new path. And here they were, the followers who wanted to catch a glimpse of the man himself. The followers who wanted to walk this road with Jesus. This road became a very special road. The people broke branches off of the palm trees that grew everywhere in the city. They laid down the palms in the road, making a giant green carpet. And they took their cloaks off of their backs and laid them down, as if a king or a queen were approaching. And they brought special things, shells, leaves, and smooth stones to line his way.

As I listened to the stories and watched the road become decorated with simple, beautiful things, something came over me. I felt like I was close to something really big, something hard to describe. There was hope and joy filling the air, lifted up on the people’s shouts and songs. The people, the road – we were all welcoming Jesus, who was bringing new life and new hope to our city and our world.



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And before I knew what I was doing, I found a tree with several branches still hanging, and I broke off a palm leaf. I laid it down among the cloaks and stones and other palms, adding my symbol of hope to the road. I joined the crowd in their changing and singing, I cheered to see Jesus pass by on a small donkey. I felt my heart grow full with love and joy and hope.

And knowing what I know now I would do it again.

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Pastor Barbara

Sisters and brothers, today we join with Christ’s disciples of every age and nation. We gather and re-enact the street drama of this so-called triumphant procession. As we stand at the beginning of another Holy Week, holding our palms, we imagine that we too were there. With those first century bystanders, we ask the question “Who is this man?”. And with them, we are asked by God to follow in Christ’s path. So...knowing what we know now, knowing how this story ends, are we ready to do it again? Are we ready to lay down our palms before him and are we ready to follow where he goes?

Some of you may recall from past years that we have spoken of two processions entering into Jerusalem during that week of Passover. This image bears repeating. In their book, *The Last Week*, New Testament scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, tell us that “Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30. One was a peasant procession; the other an imperial procession.” From the East, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives.” But also, “on the opposite side of the city, from the West, Pontius Pilate, the Roman



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governor also entered Jerusalem [that day] at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers. ... Jesus' procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate's, the power of empire." Pilate's procession had all the militaristic trappings we might expect: cavalry on horses and leather armor, helmets and weapons and banners. It is no wonder that the gospels speak of turmoil in the city. These two processions, these two pathways of tremendous power, literally come crashing into each other in the heart of Jerusalem, and eventually at the cross. And, they still are colliding to this day.

This has been a very difficult year and it's not even half over. This year we have had earthquakes and tsunami in Japan and their ongoing nuclear problems.. Today we are involved in war in three countries, ten years in Afghanistan and over eight years in Iraq. On a lesser scale we are involved in the civil war in Libya. Across the world there are revolutions and uprisings in Egypt, Tuinisian, Bahrain, Ivory Coast and other places. There seems to be more violence in Israel and Palestine. Politically there are battles of the budget with so many cuts affecting those that are most vulnerable and most in need. The unions are being challenged with severe loss of power and our United States Government has narrowly escaped coming to a standstill. I think we need to ask ourselves which path are we on? Which path are we on as a nation? Which path are we on as a community? Which path are we on as individuals? ... Sisters and brothers, when you go home today, I suggest you put your palm in a prominent place in your home and let it remind you to walk the path that Jesus walked. When you lay down your palm, lay down with it your hatred, your grudges. Lay down your "guns" in whatever form they may take. Lay down your fears and your complacency. Lay down your hearts and let God's mercy, justice and peace made known through Christ and through you lead the procession. Knowing what we know now, how can we do otherwise? For who is this man? It is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee, who speaks the truth in love to power. It is no other than God's own son, both fully human and fully divine. May we too stand up and follow in his pathway, speaking truth to power and caring for each other. Amen and Amen.