

The Colors of Faith—Purple

April 13, 2014

Matthew 21:1-11

1 And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Beth'phage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If any one says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and he will send them immediately." 4 This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass." 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat thereon. 8 Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" 10 And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" 11 And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee."

Today we are one step further in our Colors of Faith series. Today we focus on our sixth color. The color purple. Appropriate as we enter into Holy Week. The color purple for its rarity and expense in ancient times was reserved for royalty. It was the color of Kings and Queens denoting their status. It is the color that Jesus was mockingly draped in later this week when a crown of thorns was placed on his head on the road to the cross. Today however is Palm Sunday, the Sunday that kicks off the beginning of our Holy Week. We as people of faith celebrate this week as a time of reflection and anticipation for what is coming. It never gets old as we relive and re-experience some of the most significant events in our understandings of Christ.

Growing up I always loved a good parade! I did not always know what was going on, or why we were celebrating but it was always fun to be at and witness too. Plus I cannot deny I adored the candy and toys that was typically thrown out to the kids, and any adults willing to scramble! I also, as you have probably gathered, love musicals. Hopefully many of us have seen Hello Dolly? Well, again, add it to your cultural bucket list if you have not. In this musical they have a fantastic parade scene filled with Bands and horse drawn carriages people marching, floats, animals, the works! It goes on for seemingly forever and Dolly sings the rousing anthem "When the Parade Passes By". Parades mark the changing of the seasons for us. For many the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade signals the beginning of the Christmas season. There is typically for most of us a parade around July 4th often accompanied by a dazzling display of fireworks. Who does not enjoy a good parade? The excitement, the energy!

I have a good friend who lives in New Orleans and she at one point was telling us of all the parades that happen in New Orleans, they have parades for everything apparently. I know we are all aware of the Mardi Gras parades and the big deal that it is marking the beginning of the Lenten season that we are currently in. But she recalled to us vividly one of the first parades she witnessed. It too was full of all the pomp and circumstance that you expect of a parade there were a lot of people and there was a lot of celebrating and then to her surprise a hearse came at the end of the parade, it was a funeral procession.

Is that not what we have here today on Palm Sunday, the triumphant entry into Jerusalem for Jesus was another parade filled with Hosanna and Hallelujah! Then at the end comes Jesus, on his way not to a celebration as one would think but on his way to his death on a cross. Really makes you think does it not?

When we consider death it is interesting to look at what some of the oldest people, those who have lived a long time have to say. One man was 114 and was asked some of his secrets to a long life

- Embrace change, even when the change slaps you in the face. ("Every change is good.")
- Eat two meals a day ("That's all you need.")
- Work as long as you can ("That money's going to come in handy.")

- Help others ("The more you do for others, the better shape you're in.")

Then there's the hardest part. It's a lesson this man said he learned from his grandfather: Accept death.

"We're going to die. Some people are scared of dying. Never be afraid to die. Because you're born to die," he said.

Have we ever considered our finitude? Not one of the most comfortable subjects is it? To consider that as we are born so too must we die. Many of us will have the opportunity to live a long and happy life to see the end draw near. Yet how do we get there...what would our death parade look like? Jesus does not have this same opportunity of living a long life but he like many of us will know, knew his death was coming, he had even foretold it time and time again to the disciples.

And yet like many times before the disciples do not really get what is about to happen. We can all remember experiences like this can we not? Take tax season for example, we know that the due date is near, it is in fact looming, but we like to put it out of our minds until we absolutely have to deal with it. I think this might be a similar mindset to that of the disciples.

So here we are gathered on the parade route, yet unlike the Disciples we are fully aware of what is coming, what will happen as the week progresses, where the story ends. Yet, still, we join in the parade every year. We tell the stories time and time again. We lay down our coats, our jackets, our cloaks, we take up palms and wave them in jubilation and praise because Jesus who we know as the Christ is in the parade. Why do we celebrate and rejoice on this parade route? We know the end of the story and as the year circles round we know that Jesus was born so that he might die. We have the inside scoop that this is a funeral parade.

We still gather on the parade route for one simple reason, we like many before us have and like many after us hopefully will, we have decided to follow Jesus. You perhaps know the old hymn that says it so simply, "I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back"

There is no turning back from following Jesus on the parade route, there is no turning back from reconciling ourselves to his immanent death on the cross, there is no turning back from the path we are on that leads us to Easter, there's no turning back, no turning back. Amen.