

Sermon *Dancing Down the Long Road*
The First Unitarian Universalist Society of Middleborough
March 29, 2015 10:30 a.m.

Today is Palm Sunday in the Christian tradition; a time to commemorate beginnings like the hardy green shoots pushing their way through the snow, like the promise of relief held out to weary people of winter and oppression. Listen to the story:

The Christian story: Matthew 21:1-11 *The Royal Welcome*

When 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."

This 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."

The 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. [symbolic of Sukkot, a harvest holiday full of abundance and gratitude] 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!"

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

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

Palm Sunday is about embarkation. We are starting down the long road, it says, through the gates that separate us from the past and open into the future. We are launching ourselves into something great and free, with more freedom than we have ever had before.

From Isaiah 62:10 – "Pass through, pass through the gates! Clear the road for the people; build up, build up the highway, remove the rocks! Raise an ensign over the peoples! ... Announce to Fair Zion, Your Deliverer is coming!"

Palm Sunday is about radicalizing peace. It's about fulfilling promises in a completely unexpected way. The Deliverer won't ride in on a warhorse, but on a humble donkey. From Zechariah 9:9 – "Rejoice greatly, Fair Zion; raise a shout, Fair Jerusalem! Lo, your king is coming to you. He is victorious, triumphant, yet humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Palm Sunday is about legacy. It's about committing to support a vision, to help shepherd a people through the literal and spiritual wilderness like Moses or Jesus, committing to support a vision even though we know we won't be there at the end of the journey.

Palm Sunday is a story that says a better future will come whether we see it or not, because we are here to make it happen. It is joyfulness in the face of fear. We are opening the gates in peace and humility and apprehension, determined to stay on the path we choose together. Two thousand years later, Selma Sunday said we crossed the bridge in peace in front of our enemies mounted for war, marching 50 miles to Montgomery, because we had promises to keep and a world to change before we were done.

In the spirit of this season, what promises do we make to each other? We are about to embark on our own season of promise. What will we leave behind? What will encourage us to succeed? What will make us dance with joy at the thought that we might? Keep your mind on that joy.

We've done some hard work leading up to this point. We set some priorities. We affirmed shared values. We looked for solutions by thinking outside the box. A budget is one of the ways we tell each other: this is important to do now, this is important to start now and continue to do in stages, this is less important and we want to come back to it.

Church budget take 1 basically attaches a price tag to the things we said we wanted to do in the coming year. Over the course of the spring, we'll ask ourselves:

- ✓ Does this initiative answer the call of our vision?
- ✓ Does this initiative reflect our values and intentions?
- ✓ Does this initiative respond to our values of fairness and equity?
- ✓ Does this initiative play a major role in growing our congregation both in numbers and in deeper connections?
- ✓ Does this initiative enable us to make the kind of difference in the world we live in?
- ✓ Does this initiative help us to raise children who might change the world for the better?

Later on this spring, after the pledge drive, our leaders will work the numbers and bring back to you Budget take 2. We've basically voted on our vision and intentions with our pocketbooks, and now it's time to get back to each other and see what we want to do. We'll see if our leaders have reflected what is important to do now, what is important to start and continue to do in stages, and what is less important but we'll get back to it. We'll take another look at budget, take 2 and reflect our wishes back to our leaders.

Finally, the Parish Committee will take the next step and present us with a budget, take 3 to vote on at our Annual Meeting.

My colleague Christana Wille McKnight, minister of our sister church in Taunton, describes planning for the future as building a bridge, one stone at a time, while we are walking on it. It is exhilarating and daunting at the same time.

Today is the beginning of our campaign. No, we won't be asking for your pledge today, nor for some weeks to come. Today we will be asking for something equally if not more important. Today we will be asking for your intentions. We will be asking that you start to think about what you promise to be for each other, what you pledge to become as a people. We'll explain how we use our resources to fulfill

our promises right now, and we'll explain to each the promises we hope to fulfill next year and for years to come. So join us for food and conversation and take away some ideas for how you might want to contribute your time, your talents, and your treasure to make our future possible.

It is a great honor, and a real pleasure, to serve you on this adventure.

“The reason it’s a discipline (the root is the same as the word “disciple”) is that we’re forgetful — and we’re inclined to think that we’re self-made and self-reliant, which we’re not. In worship, we remind ourselves that we’re utterly dependent.” (Galen Guengerich)