

Mark 11: 1-11

Look around

Palm Sunday, Year B 2018

We live in a city of demonstrations. A permit to march on the mall has to be secured months or years in advance, you never know what you are going to come across when you head down to the Mall for a day of sightseeing. A pastor friend of mine officiated a wedding at the DC War Memorial in the midst of a rally of the Juggalos, fans of the rap group, Insane Clown Posse.

Demonstrations are not unfamiliar to us. Large crowds of people processing and shouting, sharing what they believe in with the world (and usually some unsuspecting tourists). We don't agree with every single one that takes place, but isn't that one of the privileges of our country?

Palm Sunday is one of those public, political demonstrations. As Jesus and his followers enter into the capital city, they stage a demonstration in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah, of a peasant riding into town on a donkey, a parade for a "king" who has won no battles, who has no crown, who in fact does not even fight.

Yesterday teens and their allies from across the country processed down Pennsylvania Avenue to demand that their lives and safety become a priority and that we end gun violence in our streets and mass shootings in our schools today.

As they had been planning this march, I imagine that people asked the students the same thing that the people asked the disciples, "why are you doing this?"

Why are you doing *this* when you could be playing soccer or deciding what college to attend? Why are *you* doing this, isn't it the adults' job? Why don't you leave it to them? Their answer is just as simple as the one Jesus gave the disciples. He said, "tell them the Lord needs it."

The teens answer to that question: enough is enough.

The crowds shout Hosanna, hosanna! That word sounds like a celebration but it translates to "save us," the same thing Parkland students and so many others have been crying out.

Why are you doing this? What are you doing? Those were the questions that the disciples had to be ready for. Can we answer those questions should anyone care to ask us? Shouldn't we be able to say: Jesus told us to tell anyone who asks, "This is for the Lord"?

The Lord is coming into our cities and towns, our sanctuaries and streets. That's why we are doing this. We are preparing for his entry into the midst of chaos, crowds, killers, suffering and exploitation. That's what we are doing.

Saturday's march against gun violence cannot be separated from Sunday's procession for Jesus no matter where you come out on kids walking out or walking up, bump stocks, assault weapons or background checks. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is Jesus' entry into Washington and Parkland, Newtown and Chicago, Aleppo and Damascus. Jesus is coming to all the places in desperate need of him - the places and the people who need to know that Jesus is Lord of all.

In a public demonstration, we make our faith known. We make public our loyalty and our love for Jesus, and our commitment to follow him, every day and everywhere.

This isn't a publicity stunt, the students said yesterday, this is a movement. Today is a bad day for tyranny and corruption, and the pressure is on for every person in power. I imagine the people who laid their cloaks down for Jesus as he paraded toward the temple felt the same.

Just as the students raised signs in the air, so those who went ahead of and before Jesus waved palms in the air, in victorious celebration of the one in whom they believed.

Following the demonstration, the focus of the scripture moves from the crowds back to Jesus.

I have never noticed this phrase in the reading before, but it was the very first thing that I latched on to when I started my reading on Monday morning. "Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; *and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late*, he went out to Bethany with the twelve."

When he had looked around at everything... I sense that Jesus is truly taking this all in. This is where the story pivots toward the cross, the next day he returns to the temple for another demonstration, this time against the Temple, the central religious and economic institution of the state, a grand building and the center of life in Jerusalem.

But before that demonstration, Jesus takes it all in. He knows, that is the moment that he knows that it is all going to change.

We often talk about Jesus being fully human and fully God, that this is what the incarnation is all about: God coming to earth to live and breathe and eat and die, just as humans do. When we talk about Jesus' human qualities, we talk about his need to get away for some quiet time, his weeping over his friend Lazarus, the fact that he was hungry and thirsty, just as we are. To me, this moment is also evidence of Jesus' humanity. At a pivotal moment, he stops, looks around, and takes it all in. The magnitude of the moment, the weight of all that has happened and all that is about to come.

How many of us, at similar turning points in our lives, have done the same?

On the eve of something big, we look around. We wonder what role this moment will play in the story of our lives, how will we look back and remember this time, this exact scene? How will we tell *this* story?

At the March yesterday, the stars of Hamilton and Dear Evan Hansen, two of Broadway's most popular musicals, sang a song they recorded together and released on Monday, ahead of the March.

The song starts out singing about how we tell the stories of particular nights, events and moments in history, and as I listened I thought of the students marching for their lives across the country. I also thought about how we Christians tell the story that we are in right now: the story that goes from the Hosanna's of Palm Sunday to the humiliation of the cross and begins again at the empty tomb on Easter. The story that is most formative in our lives and in our life together.

The line at the end of the song is this: "even when the dark comes crashing through, when you need a friend to carry you, when you're broken on the ground, you will be found. so let the sun come streaming in, cause you'll reach up and rise again, *if you'd only look around, you will be found.*"

As I listened to the song again and again throughout this past week, I pictured Jesus pausing in the temple, looking around, seeing his friends and the crowd that surrounded him, and gathering the courage to go on.

If we stop to look around, pause for a moment to take in our surroundings, just as Jesus did, we might notice what surrounds us. As I looked around at the March for our lives yesterday I did just that. What surrounded me, and hundreds of thousands of others, was hope, passion, compassion and courage. Despite the dark days ahead, I can't help but think that Palm Sunday many years ago felt the same.

As we enter in Holy Week, this precious time we have before Easter Sunday, I hope that you will remember the story of our faith throughout this week, read scripture, pray, lean on your fellow people of faith. I hope that you will look around and know that like Christ in his darkest moments, you will be found.