

CROSSWALK: A Part of the Parade
March 28, 2010—Palm Sunday
Luke 19:28-40

Last year, at the beginning of Lent, some friends and I went downtown to check out the Mardi Gras Parade.

Now lest you question your minister's moral compass in making the decision to be a part of such an event, just know that the city of Dallas had advertised that this was "the family-friendly" alternative to the annual wild and crazy celebration held in New Orleans.

And it was fun! The Grambling State band danced through the streets, and there were colorful floats sponsored by schools and organizations in town with people throwing beads into the crowd. There were Elvis' on motorcycles and clowns on stilts and everybody wore masks of all kinds.

After the parade had passed, my friends and I headed off to find a restaurant to eat dinner. We wound our way through the downtown Dallas streets, pushing our way through the crowds of people who were probably after the same thing as we were.

To this day, none of us still know how it happened. One minute we were all together on a sidewalk talking about which direction was the best way to get to the restaurant to which we were headed. The next minute we were found ourselves in the middle of a street with Elvis's buzzing around us on their motorcycles.

Somehow, we had joined the parade!

We tried to make a discreet exit, but at that point in the parade route the sidewalks had metal fences around them. We tried to retrace our steps to find the place where we had inadvertently taken the wrong turn, but the Grambling Band was headed our way, blocking our retreat.

So—there was nothing else to do but to be a part of the parade! We picked up excess beads off the street, and began tossing them to the crowds that lined the road. We waved and smiled, as if we had every right to be there.

We had joined the parade, and got caught up in the excitement of the moment. After all, everybody loves a parade.

The marketing people at Subaru seem to understand that, too. Their most recent commercial shows a parade in small town USA, with its high school marching band followed by a float with the Queen of the parade dressed in frilly ballgown and tiara, waving her gloved hand at her neighbors lining the streets.

All of a sudden, a Subaru Outback with a kayak tied to its roof inadvertently takes a wrong turn and becomes a part of the parade. Its muddy exterior tells you that it had traveled off road for quite a while. But the crowd cheers wildly when they see it. At the end of the 30 second commercial, the announcer says, “the dirtier it gets, the more it shines,” evoking the lure of rugged adventure to which many people are drawn.

Everybody loves a parade—and today’s scripture affirms that it has been so for a long time. I wonder if there were any pedestrians on that fateful day we now call Palm Sunday who made a wrong turn onto the street that led down from the Mt. of Olives and up to the City on a Hill, Jerusalem.

I wonder if they got caught up in the excitement of the parade, and, like the Mardi Gras bead toss, they threw their cloaks upon the ground in front of the donkey, or perhaps grabbed an extra palm frond and began waving it, shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

I wonder if they got caught up in the moment, the contagion of parade excitement, not fully realizing what this procession was all about.

I also wonder if those that had more understanding—the disciples--weren’t lured by the rugged adventure of following this man, this Jesus, who was considered dirty—unclean—by the powers that be. I wonder if, like the Subaru

ad, the rebels were roused that day by the idea that “the dirtier it gets, the more it shines” and so they processed with the Light of the World, not understanding where the light was guiding them.

Theologians Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan write about this first and very complex day of the period we call Holy Week in their book The Last Week.

They begin their account of Jesus' last seven days with a colorful description of this procession by the King of Peace into one end of Jerusalem, while at the same time that the Roman Empire's representative, Pontius Pilate, full of brute power, entered at the other end. Pilate arrived to “keep the peace” in the city during the turbulent time of Passover, when the crowds always got a little unruly. He traveled with troops and flags and weapons, all the signs of empire, very impressive, of course. And he rode a magnificent warhorse, in case the flags and weapons and troops weren't a sufficiently intimidating display of power.

On the other hand, Jesus made his entrance riding a humble donkey, surrounded by his somewhat ragged group of followers. We know he, too, came to bring peace to the people, but not the same kind of peace Pilate and Rome intended, a business-as-usual kind of peace that benefitted the empire and the folks on top. No, Jesus brought instead the peace that surpasses understanding, and much of what was to unfold in the next few days would be the price he paid to bring it.

Perhaps Quaker Tom Mullen was right when he wrote once, “if you really want to cause conflict, work for peace” (Mullen, Tom, *Laughing Out Loud and Other Religious Experiences*, pg. 50).

I wonder if any of the people who were a part of the parade that day had any idea what was really going on. I wonder if they saw the Pharisees who lined the road, or heard them when they shouted orders at Jesus to “stop the procession, for goodness sake, and calm your disciples down.”

And did they hear Jesus fling back words of challenge from atop his colt that if the paraders themselves were silent, the very rocks and stones would begin to shout out for justice, for peace?

Or were they all just caught up in the excitement of being a part of a parade—of being somebodies when they would have been no-bodies in the parade that was processing on the other side of town.

Did they understand?

Do we understand?

This Palm Sunday parade is the beginning of the end of Jesus' Crosswalk. Everything Jesus had said and done leads up to the cross;

all the healing, the teaching, the calling of disciples, the fasting and praying, the driving out of demons and the calming of waters, the multiplying of loaves and the blessing and breaking of bread, the time in the wilderness and the time on the road, the words to his disciples and the arguments with the powerful—

all of his life, has come to this, the facing of death on a cross.

This is a parade that comes to an abrupt halt when Jesus begins to cry as he looks over the city of Jerusalem, representing all the cities of the world

all the nations, all the peoples,

who do not understand what they were created to be

who do not get what it means to love one another as God loves

us.

All of a sudden, the tenor of the parade changes drastically,

and we find ourselves dramatically in the middle of another kind of procession—

a funeral procession,

and we hear the echo of a Dixieland band playing softly and slowly, "O When the saints, go marching in...."

Are we ready to be part of this parade to the cross?

