

I remember standing on the National Mall in Washington DC with a small group of seminary friends. I was wearing the very first collared clergy shirt I had ever owned. It was April 1992 and I was young and new to feminism. Standing up for a woman's reproductive rights was scary to me then, but there I was, on a small knoll on the green trying to keep our tie dyed banner from blowing away in the wind.

For the most part I avoided protests as a young adult. My anxiety at facing other people's anger was too great, and with a growing awareness of my own identity as a member of the LGBTQIA community, I also feared the hatred I had seen targeted at people who challenged the expected norm. Gun violence at mass gatherings was not common in the early 90s so I didn't expect that kind of danger, but the threat of being physically attacked, or the possibility of being yelled at by the angry opposition, was almost paralyzing. Protests of any kind, for any issue, made me terribly uncomfortable. I was raised to be polite and never argue about religion or politics or anything for that matter. My socialization as a good Christian girl was thorough.

We often think of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as a joyful parade, and we imagine ourselves standing there with all the people waving palms and shouting hosanna. We re-enact it each year in one way or another. But in truth, the procession of palms on that particular day was a peaceful protest against the power of the Roman Empire. It was less a joyful celebration and more a satire of the Roman ritual of military triumph. We don't know if the people who greeted Jesus as he entered the city recognized this to be the case. But Jesus certainly would have known the impact such a display would have on those in places of power.

I've grown more confident as an advocate for social justice as I've aged. I think it's true that the older you get the less you care what other people think, but it still takes me a minute to settle comfortably into the work of non-violent peaceful protest. This church takes that work seriously. I've had the honor and privilege of standing shoulder to shoulder with members and friends of FCC, in just the last few months, supporting reasonable gun safety legislation and demanding an end to racism, poverty, and the false moral narrative of religious nationalism. The presence of Christ in this community calls us to move beyond these walls; calls us to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves, and to join with those who refuse to be silent any longer.

This familiar story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem reminds me that I must build and nurture the courage within me to speak truth even in difficult situations. Sometimes that means saying out loud that I believe all beings have

inherent goodness. Sometimes it means living openly in ways that honor the fact that life can grow out of loss. Having the courage to speak truth in difficult situations always means loving with such abandon that sacrifice for the benefit of others becomes the norm.

Mahatma Gandhi is quoted as saying “Without a direct-action expression of it, nonviolence, to my mind, is meaningless.” He followed up this statement with an example. He said refusing to cooperate with those who impose violence against others is a direct-action expression of nonviolence. Jesus rode a humble donkey to show his opposition to Roman occupation. If he had come in riding on a massive steed with a sword at his side it would have been much easier for them to cut him down right then and there. He refused to cooperate with the oppressors, and chose a direct-action expression of nonviolence instead. But as a good advocate for change, Jesus knew that he had to do more than simply protest. He also had to offer an alternative, and one that he was willing to commit to and work toward. And so he taught those who would listen about the creation of a beloved community of grace, love, forgiveness and sacrifice. He healed the sick and welcomed the children and challenged the rich and hung out with outcasts.

There are so many places in this world where this kind of peaceful protest, this kind of holy objection, is needed. And it takes courage to step up and into that role. There are also places in our own lives where we need the courage to speak truth; where a word of forgiveness is necessary, a word of comfort, a word of confrontation.

We look to Jesus to guide us in such endeavors. We look to the courage of Christ to shape our own actions. And we reinforce our commitment to his vision of a just and loving kin-dom through our prayer and worship, through study and song, and through gathering with the Beloved Community. This morning, as you enter the Pilgrim Room, you'll be handed a card that looks like this. We would like to invite you to write a prayer on this palm for yourself or for others, and I'd like to suggest that you think in terms of courage. Where is courage needed right now? Who is in need of it? How can you pray for it? We'll be posting our prayers on the Faith Connections bulletin board so we can say these prayers for one another.

I am especially inspired by art and music, and there is a song taught by the Poor People's Campaign that I'd like to share with you this morning. It's a call and response song, and you'll find the words printed in the bulletin just below the sermon title. There's only a couple lines that you are not meant to repeat. Your part is in parentheses.

Courage (courage/justice/hope)
my friend (my friend)
You do not walk alone
We will (we will)
walk with you (walk with you)
And sing your spirit home

Like Jesus, we walk a path that will not always be easy. A path that is lined with challenging moments that will often require a great deal of sacrifice. Thank God we do not walk it alone. May we continually sing our spirits home as we seek the courage of Christ together. Amen.