

"Parades Provoke Passion"
A Sixth Sunday in Lent, Palm Sunday
Matthew 21:1-11; April 9, 2017
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

HOLY PROVOCATION!

"I Was Provoked" by Emily Heath—

"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" - Hebrews 10:24-25

Have you ever heard someone say, "I was provoked"? Sometimes you hear it as a defense after a fight: "He provoked me!" The idea is that whatever response came next, it was somehow justified.

That's why I've always thought of "being provoked" as something negative, or as an attempted excuse for violence. Because at the end of the day, you can't blame someone else for your own bad behavior.

But what about the other side? What about being provoked to do good?

The author of Hebrews tells their readers that they can "provoke one another to love and good deeds". They can be encouragers who gather in community to lift one another up.

In my 20's I had a mentor who provoked me. She provoked me to do the right thing, to live a life of gratitude, and to serve God first. She provoked me to want to be a better person. How? By simply being herself, a good and kind and decent person who encouraged others and expected the best of them.

Would I be the person I am today had I not met her? My guess is probably not. 20 year old me needed a little provocation in the right direction, and by God's grace I got it.

But for too many, the spiritual journey is one that is walked in isolation. And without the loving provocation of good people of faith, the angry provocations of a harsh world can be overwhelming.

And so our job as followers of Christ in community is to provoke one another with kindness, with compassion, with loving challenges, and with encouragement. Because ours is a *provocative* faith, in the very best sense of the word.

Prayer

O God, provoke me, that I may provoke others, and that we may provoke the world.

PARADES ARE PROVOCATIVE

Parades are provocative. Parades—of all kinds. Of marches and rallies and festivities on the 4th. Of Palm parades and donkeys—Triumphal Entries, or Macy's Thanksgiving Day. For, Parades and our place in them send a message. Our cheering in the crowd puts us in a particular position.

In Jerusalem that week, the same crowd that cheered "Hosanna, Hosanna, Blessed Is He that comes in the name of the Lord!" Were the *same* crowd that only a few days later changed the cheer to "Crucify Him!" For following Jesus —on that week, and *every* week was—and still is—a provocative path. To proclaim, Jesus is Lord! is to make a radical political statement: Caesar is not! The rulers of this world do not have our ultimate allegiance and worship.

First century Christians lost their heads for making such a treasonous statement: Jesus is Lord! Something we say and sing in church all the time without giving it a second thought.

And here we are today! Cheering and praising and hoopla on Palm Sunday: Palms a'waving, Hosanna!! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Highest praise and devotion and allegiance are to our God! Not losing our heads—at least literally!

But here's the rub. Here's the provocative point: If we're going to march in the Parade, or even watch from the sidelines, lay down our cloaks and sing and shout and wave—if we're going to the parade, calling ourselves followers of Jesus Christ, then we have to go the whole journey.

Turn over some tables. Challenge the corruption—things done in the name of God that are not *of* God. Speak to power and corruption. Not pretend all is peaceful and just in the Temple. We have to go to the Table, the Last Supper with Jesus. To the Garden. To the agonizing in prayer and pain; the wrestling in tears and doubt.

And then, to the Cross on the Hill. To the shame and sacrifice of holding so strongly to our convictions of love of God and neighbor, that our life is on the line. And ultimately, laying down that life in order to find life.

And along the way, and before and during and after the crucifixion, death, time in the tomb and Resurrection on Easter Morning, we have to love what Jesus loves! Care about the ones and the things Jesus cared about. If, indeed, we call out our praise at the Parade.

Lord, Lord, they cried!

'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

For, indeed, you can't have the hoopla if you don't also have the holy sacrifice and giving it all.

Parades provoke Passion. Passion of the very best kind. Passion

for the right, for the world, for the least of these. Passion provoked so strongly, that we might even have to lay down our lives.

AFTER THE PARADE IS OVER

What will we do *after* the Parade? After the shouting has ceased, the cloaks picked up and worn home? The palms gathered up from around the Sanctuary and the parade route—taken to be burned and transformed into a reminder next year of our earthiness and dust.

Do you know what Jesus did, after the Parade? He didn't grab a beer and a picnic with this family in the park.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple (Matthew 21:12-14)

¹² Then Jesus entered the temple^g and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer';

but you are making it a den of robbers."

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them.

SINGING THE STORY OF HOLY WEEK

Christ Jesus, On Sunday, You Rode into Town

ST. DENIO 11. 11. 11. 11 ("Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise")

Christ Jesus, on **Sunday**, you rode into town;
The crowds laid their coats and some palms on the ground.
They made you a welcome and called you their king,
But they did not know of the reign you would bring.

Christ Jesus, on **Monday**, you went up to pray;

The sellers were filling the Temple that day.
But who could be reverent? That courtyard was loud;
You overturned tables, dispersing the crowd.
Christ Jesus, on **Thursday**, you readied a place;
You hosted a meal and you offered the grace.
You told your disciples, "Now eat of this bread,"
"Now drink of the cup of salvation," you said.

With basin and towel, with washing of feet,
You showed us where love and humility meet.
You loved till your love led to suffering and loss;
You knelt down to serve us, then hung on a cross.

On **Friday**, you died, and the next day was bleak.
O Christ, we remember your *whole* Holy Week.
We can't avoid suffering, or turn from what's true,
For out of your death, we find new life in you.

(Biblical References: Matthew 21:1-17; 26-28; John 13:1-17
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ON LIFE ABUNDANT, by Rev. Mark Sandlin
Good and gracious God,
Life is full...
of distractions.

Full...
of glitter and gold.

Full...
of things –
things which we
have given value.

Too frequently,
we find ourselves
made captive
and distracted

by these valuable baubles
we have created.

Sometimes
they are money
and the things which it can buy.

Sometimes
they are ideas
which we have raised
to the status of gods.

Sometimes
they are our desires
which we have elevated
over the desires,
and sometimes
over the needs,
of other people.

And sometimes
they are much more devious
than that.

Sometimes
they are greed,
power, privilege,
hate, revenge,
self-importance
and any number
of emotional sinkholes
that can pull us in
and pull us under
until it seems
we have no choice
but to live in them
the rest of our lives.

May we be reminded
that the life
Jesus taught us about
is a full life –
a life abundant.

Abundant
because its focus is on joy,
hope,
forgiveness,
helping others,
supporting one another,
kindness, peace,
love
and those things
which build each other
and ourselves up.

May we set aside
the things that distract us
and take up
more of the things
that make life more full.

And in doing so
may we increase
the fullness of the lives
of others. Amen.