

Throw It a Parade

4/10/2022

Rev. Jeff Mansfield



Preaching on:

Luke 19:28-40

I've been to a lot of parades in my life. I'm sure you all have too, but I think the moment that I realized just how powerful a parade could be was when I led a march of about 100 people through Midtown Manhattan to protest the working conditions inside of one of celebrity chef Mario Batali's restaurants in the Meatpacking District.

Well, you have to know a little backstory is that I wasn't always a minister in a church. There was a time where I was a minister out on the streets. And I was a laborer organizer. I worked for a worker's center called the Restaurant Opportunity Center of New York. And we were organizing workers in one of Mario Batali's restaurants called Del Posto. And if you know anything about Mario Batali, you know he's had a tremendous fall from grace in the intervening years since the Me Too movement came along. But at the time we had heard all kinds of stories from the workers inside the restaurant about racial discrimination on the job, wage theft, the stealing of tips and sexual harassment on the job. And the workers were beginning to get organized so that they could fight the conditions at their workplace. And part of that was that I, as the organizer, was leading this grand march of about 100 people from Midtown Manhattan. And all of them, because of my religious connection, were church connected people. So it was churchy people and seminary people and we were going to support the workers.

And we were marching sort of two by two through Midtown Manhattan and everybody was kind of clapping and chanting and they were singing songs. And as people were watching us march through the Meatpacking district, they started, they were turning their heads, like, "What are you guys doing? Where are you going?" And

this is a true story, I did not expect this to happen, but people joined the parade. They joined the march. They came with us.

When we got to Del Posto, we started with like 100 people. Now we had, I don't know, 125 or more people. And we were spread out in front of the restaurant and we had signs and people were singing and chanting and making all kinds of noise and diners were walking up to the restaurant and asking us what's going on. And we were telling them about why we were there and they were leaving or they were going inside and they were complaining to the managers and the managers were coming out. They came out with money. They said, "I'll pay you to go away. Just go away. This isn't the right night." It was like a Friday night.

And it just became this scene out there of people just chanting and singing and expressing what they felt in their hearts for what was going on for the workers inside. And there were a few workers who were out there with us who weren't on the job that night. And you could just kind of see it in their faces, this sense of pride and power that, "Yes, we are going to overcome. We are going to make a difference." And as I watched this scene, I just realized, my God, how powerful a parade can really be in the life of a movement or in the life of an individual person.

I was kind of high off that all weekend and just feeling really great about what we had accomplished. And I knew it had just made a big impact at the restaurant, that they were going to have a conversation with us about this. This was an attempt to get them to the table. And I walked into the office, I think it was Monday. And there was some paperwork that was waiting there for me at the office. And I opened it up and it was from Mario Batali's lawyers and it said, "We are suing you for \$6 million for inciting a riot, destruction of property, intimidation of employees, slander, libel, and defamation. And in that moment, I realized even more just how powerful a parade could be, but I also realized how risky a parade can feel. Because when I looked at that number and it said, "Jeffrey Mansfield, \$6 million," and the blood kind of drained out of my face and I realized the commitment that I had made for myself for what I believed in.

And you can feel that tension between power and risk in the Palm Sunday story that we just read. Jesus and His disciples, they're kind of on the down low to begin with. They're up on the top of the Mount of Olives. They're not making a big deal about this thing. They know that they're going to have a procession into the city, but they haven't even gotten a horse yet. So they send some of the disciples off to find a donkey, which is kind of Jesus' sly way of making of the sort of snubbing his nose at kings. He's not going to be a horse-riding conqueror. He's going to be a donkey riding servant. And He says, and the disciples say, "Well, what if we're taking somebody's donkey? And they ask us what to do with it."

He says, "Just give them the secret password. The Lord has need of it and they'll let you take it." And they go and they find this donkey and they bring it in. And Jesus starts riding this little donkey into the city. And the people begin to come out and they begin to shout and they begin to sing and they begin to demonstrate and lay down their cloaks and lay down the palm branches. And the crowd is growing and surging and the Pharisees run up to Jesus with their hearts in their throats.

It's not that they don't believe it's just that they're terrified. And they say, "Jesus, tell them to be quiet. Don't you know the risk that you're running?" And the risks were very real. This was exactly the kind of thing that the Romans loved to crucify people for. I mean, this was insurrection. This was a Messiah riding into one of their cities to say, "I am the true king of these people." That's exactly the kind of thing that got you crucified by the Romans and they had all sorts of experience with this kind of thing happening. This was Passover and Pontius Pilate came into the city with the Roman garrisons for Passover to keep the peace.

Well, keeping the peace didn't mean anything except making sure that these insurrectionists didn't get any ideas and try to rabble rouse during Passover when everybody's blood is up. "We don't want anybody saying anything that would undermine our authority here." And they knew that this could be the kind of thing where a Roman garrison could come into this parade and just lay everybody down, cut them down, kill them all. So they say to Jesus, "Jesus, be careful, make them be quiet. Don't you know the risk that you're running?"

And Jesus said, "If they were silent, then the very stones would shout. If they were silent, the very stones would shout." That's an incredible response to a very real risk. I want you to think about that. I want you to think about how you think about risk and putting yourself out there in a public way and taking risks, real risks, with your position with, with your family, with your life, with your reputation. Because there are times that we are called to really put it on the line, to put it on the line for our faith, to put it on the line for God or for our neighbor. We're called to stand up and step out and say, "No. Enough is enough." Or to step out for something that we truly believe in and to hold our head up high for the rights of others, for their humanity.

And sometimes there's a real risk with that. There's a real risk to going out and marching on the streets. I've gone out and marched on the streets and I've been arrested. I've known people who have gone out and marched on the streets and they came home with a concussion. There are people in other parts of the world who have gone out to march on the streets, it's even happened in this country, and they've died. They've been killed. And how does Jesus respond to the risk? Jesus simply says, "If they were silent, the stones would shout."

Have you ever felt that way in your life? That God was calling you to take a risk? And the only thing that you were leaving out of that calculation was the power of the truth of the message that had been given to you. Jesus is saying the most important variable, the most important factor, when you calculate that risk, is the truth. Because sometimes the truth has to come out and if it doesn't come out of you, what's going to happen? The very stones themselves are going to shout.

I wonder what that sounds like when the stones begin to shout? What would that sound like in your life? Jesus, when we think about Palm Sunday, we think that Palm Sunday is all about Jesus' divinity. He is marching into the city a kingly God, and all of the people are recognizing Him. It's, Jesus' sort of most heroic movement, moment, in all of the gospels where he really looks like a traditional hero, somebody riding high and being recognized by everyone and the whole city coming out to support Him.

But it's not just about Jesus' divinity. There is something that Jesus is doing here that is so unique to His humanity. And you're have to remember that Jesus is fully God, but Jesus is also fully human. And I don't think that Palm Sunday is just about the God part. It is also about Jesus' human part. And this is something that is unique to us as human beings. As human beings each and every one of us has something within us. It's inside of you. It's a truth. It's a power. It's an identity. It's a calling of vocation. There is something inside of you, by definition of you being a human being, that you are being called to bring out and show to the world and give to the world. It is a gift, a power, a meaning, a reason for being. Each and every one of you has that inside of you.

And in fact, if you're a human being, as you travel through the journey of your life, you discover things about your identity, about who you are, about what it is that's inside of you that you're being called to do. And in one moment, it may be this, and three decades from now it may be that. But because you are human, it is inside of you and you are expected to bring it out.

How do you bring it out? How do you get it out when it's hard, when it's risky, when you don't know the way? Jesus says you get on your donkey and you just keep riding forward. You just keep riding forward. Palm Sunday isn't about being the Messiah, the King, the Son of God. It is a demonstration to all of us of this fundamentally human condition. Each of us has something within us that must come out all the time. In every stage of our life, there is something that we are meant to give. And if we don't give it what will happen in our lives? The sound of the stones shouting will follow us everywhere. We will feel it, that there is something in us that is trying to be born and we are not giving it an exit. We are not giving it an opportunity.

And the reason that Palm Sunday is so powerful and so beautiful is because it is Jesus accepting who He is, His deepest identity and purpose on display for the whole world and all the risks be damned. He is who He is. He is called to do what He does. And nothing is going to stand in the way.

It's easy for us to think about the perspective of the people on the streets following Jesus. We can put ourselves in their mindset, waving their palms, and bowing down to Jesus and giving Jesus worship and honor. We can get into the perspective of the Pharisees, the doubters, who say, "Shut up, be quiet. It's too risky. Don't do it." We've all heard that voice in our heads. We can even get into the perspective of that donkey, walking along with Jesus on his back, looking at this crowd and trying to imagine what is going on here?

But very rarely do we put ourselves in the perspective of Jesus, the one that we are called to follow, who was bringing His identity out of Him in demonstration to all of us that we have a gift and an identity that needs to be brought out at all costs. And the question for us is how do we throw ourselves a parade? How do we experience that power despite the risks in our lives? And that's what I hope that you can go out into Holy Week and the Easter season with that question on your hearts. This gift that I have been given, and you know that you've been given one, this identity that I am being called to birth, this truth that I must speak. How do I throw it a parade despite all the risks?