

“The Bible: A Challenging Path”
John 12:12-19

One of the most well-known parts of the story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is the parade or march that took place on that day. In order to connect us to the intensity of that entry and of that day, I would like us to imagine some of our modern-day protests of people demanding justice. The song that many protesters around the world have been using comes from the musical *Les Misérables* “Do You Hear the People Sing?” This song is often translated into the local language where people are demanding justice. The original setting of the song was 1832 France depicting the many uprisings during a volatile period of French history with people demanding justice under an oppressive government, rampant class divide, and social instability. The song has captured the imagination of many people around the world who are struggling under oppressive governments. Most recently, the protesters in Myanmar adapted the song to their local context and have used it in their protests against the military coup. We are going to listen to the song but as we do, I want you to imagine it in the context of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. The people were longing for freedom and they had had several uprisings before. They were waiting for a Messiah who would save them from the oppression of the Romans. (Valerie sings “Do You Hear the People Sing?”)

"Do You Hear the People Sing?"
Do you hear the people sing?
Singing the song of angry men?
It is the music of the people
Who will not be slaves again!
When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums

There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes!

Will you join in our crusade?
Who will be strong and stand with me?
Beyond the barricade
Is there a world you long to see?
Then join in the fight
That will give you the right to be free!

Do you hear the people sing?
Singing the song of angry men?
It is the music of the people
Who will not be slaves again!
When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums

There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes!
Will you give all you can give
So that our banner may advance?

Some will fall and some will live
Will you stand up and take your chance?
The blood of the martyrs
Will water the meadows of France!

Do you hear the people sing?
Singing the song of angry men?
It is the music of the people
Who will not be slaves again!
When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums
There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes

Chanting in a protest is a very powerful tool to give the people courage to rise up against oppression. That is exactly what the people were doing on that day in Jerusalem. As they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, they sang their ancient songs of deliverance and waved their palm branches with their hope for a savior, a messiah, and a king who would come and liberate them from the oppression of the Romans. The people had witnessed the signs which Jesus did, especially the raising of Lazarus from the dead. As a result, they became convinced that Jesus was going to be their savior and their king. They were ready to make him their leader because they saw that he had great powers and great courage. So as he walked into Jerusalem this time, they did what they could to show that he was going to be the next Messiah, the anointed one who would bring them salvation from oppression. Jesus being welcomed with palm branches was not an ordinary welcome of a celebrity or a leader. The palms were a symbol of the Jewish desire for deliverance. For example when Judas Maccabeus entered into Jerusalem (164 BCE) after defeating the Seleucids (the Greek Empire which was established by Alexander the Great), he was greeted with palm branches (1 Maccabees 13:51) The waving of the branches showed that the people were hoping that Jesus would become their liberator king. The word hosanna literally means "save us, we pray." In Psalm 118:25 we find this shout of praise and call for help, "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give success!" In other Jewish literature, this shout expressed the Jewish hope for a savior who would deliver them from oppression.

Jesus went into the city with a lot of expectations riding on his shoulders. He wanted to liberate his people from the oppression, but he also wanted to help them do it in a way that allowed for the transformation of the whole system of human power. He wanted to deal with the root causes of human cruelty and violence. So he intentionally rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, a humble animal that was normally used for service and farming and not for war or show of power.

The people who followed Jesus had to learn time and again to let go of their expectations about power and success in order to learn what true success and power were. They had to let go of the worldview of the Roman Empire in order to embrace the way of Jesus.

The path of Jesus is challenging because it requires that we let go of our ways of thinking about power and how we get justice and peace. The norms around us tell us that it is about personal power, violence, security, wealth, and control. They are so normal in our culture that we never stop to question their efficacy. They promise us peace through prosperity but they fail to help us really get deep in life. They leave us grasping for more and always on the edge as victims of our circumstances. Think back to your childhood and what you were told about success and happiness in life. We keep seeking after these illusions until we encounter something deeper within us and in the heart of all of life. Until we learn to be vulnerable, to embrace love even when hate seems as the only way, to see the sacred in all of life, to pray deeply, to walk into the brokenness of humanity with openness instead of judgment, and to seek harmony in the midst of strife, we will not be able to find true freedom and peace.

This is not easy because the transformation of the world depends on us doing this difficult inner work and supporting each other on the journey and this takes time and perseverance. It takes God's grace to keep us on this path as we are buffeted by the winds of the culture around us.

Lectio Divina:

John 14:27

"27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Amen.