



“The Palm Sunday March”

Matthew 21:1-11

Palm Sunday 2026

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I spent two summers in San Francisco in the 1980’s. Both summers I went to the Gay Pride Parade. The first time it was pure celebration, full of energy and song and joy and lots of outrageous costumes and lavishly decorated floats. It was unlike anything this 17-year-old Midwesterner had ever seen.

Four years later, I was back and again went to the parade. It was so, so different. Somber, reflective, serious. There was grief and there was anger and there were calls for action.

What happened between those two parades? HIV/AIDS happened. It had ripped through the Bay area.

And a parade had become more of a protest.

What’s the difference between a protest and a parade?

A parade:

- Connected to a specific day – New Year’s, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July
- Or celebrating an accomplishment – sports championship, orbiting the earth
- Lighthearted, fun
- Marching bands, floats
- Planned in advance, often well-funded, well-organized (**take down**)
- Not a whole lot at stake

A protest:

- Not too many marching bands or floats.
- Often fueled by anger or grief.
- Tend to be more spontaneous, home-grown.
- Advocating for some kind of change.
- Something is at stake.

What about Palm Sunday? Which is it? Parade or protest? I think it has elements of both. I tried to put the words together.

Prorade? Partest?

Neither of them works particularly well.

But even the words parade and protest don't fully capture the Palm Sunday event. I started calling what happened that day the Palm Sunday march. A lot of people are involved. This is the first time masses of people join Jesus and the disciples. And in Matthew's gospel they don't just stand on the sidelines. They join the throng.

Where is Jesus to be found in this movement of people? Not at the front. He's not a parade marshal. Not at the back. He's not Santa Claus at the Thanksgiving Day parade.

He's to be found right in the middle of it all. Surrounded by folks who make the decision to join him in this parade/protest. This movement. This march. Why do they join in? They want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They long to be seen, heard, valued. They want to get closer to God.

If we were in Jerusalem that day, would we join the Palm Sunday march? It's a commitment. It means leaving our comfort zone, putting on our walking shoes, setting aside time and energy.

Would we join the Palm Sunday march? I think we would. More than that. I think we are a part of it now.

What began that day outside Jerusalem... I believe that it continues to this day. That movement never died. It slowed to a halt during Holy Week. And for weeks after the death and resurrection of Jesus. But then it started slowly moving forward again as the early church was born. Throughout the centuries, this Palm Sunday march lurched and surged, sometimes heading off in the wrong direction. But with the guidance of the spirit, the march finds its way. Through the centuries, this movement continues with Jesus in the middle, throngs of people with him, saying "We're with him. We are part of a movement shaped by the life death and resurrection of Jesus. A movement shaped by Jesus' invitation to love God and love neighbor."

Which brings me to Broad Street's work in the community that Kenny spoke of so eloquently: providing food to our neighbors, helping people stay housed, tutoring, a community garden, a partnership with Bethany Presbyterian Church.

When we do that work, when we support that work, the Palm Sunday march gets bigger and stronger. Put another way, through this activity, we are a part of a movement that stretches all the way back to Palm Sunday.

One of the ways we support that work is through giving money. Let me tell you why I give financially to Neighborhood Ministries. So much is happening in the world that I don't understand, that I don't agree with, that I can't control but this – this work we do in the community – I understand it, it aligns with my deepest values and my small contributions of time, energy and money have a real impact.

I know I'm not alone in that. So many of you have shared with me why you give. And in 2025, so many of you did. I think particularly of the time of the government shutdown when so many of you gave and gave to keep the Food Pantry stocked. That included so many in our community, students, elected officials, concerned neighbors gave their time, their energy, their prayers, their money.

That Palm Sunday march/that movement got bigger and stronger.

In this movement, we are not alone. We have company. Lots of company. We have the example, the inspiration of those who have gone before us. In the present, we have company here at the church and in the community and around the world. And we have confidence that this march will continue long after we are gone. Because we are a part of something bigger than ourselves.

Which means it's not all up to us.

If you have sung in a choir and sung a piece of music that has a long, sustained note, the kind that you can't complete in one breath, your director tells you not to breathe at the same time. Pay attention to those around you and take a breath but not at the same time as those around you so the note continues to be sustained.

That's how this Palm Sunday movement works. We all take breaths when we need to. We step out of the movement for a time. To tend to things. To tend to our own health and well-being. To tend to the health and well-being of those nearest and dearest to us. Or we simply get distracted. We all get distracted. We lose focus. And the Palm Sunday march goes on without us. And when we are ready, we rejoin it. There's always an opportunity to rejoin the Palm Sunday march.

It's the gift of being a part of something bigger than ourselves. Being a part of something that aligns with our deepest values.

On that first Palm Sunday, crowds walked with Jesus, marched with Jesus, raising their voices, claiming their right to be loved, to be seen, to be treated with dignity and respect, connecting their lives to God's work in the world.

This Palm Sunday, we are still marching. We march in order to get closer to God. We march for our neighbors, our community. We march, putting our resources of time, money, energy, love in alignment with what we believe matters to God.

When we do that, we are in good company. Lots of good company. Most of all we are in the company of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, the crucified and risen One, the one we worship, the one we seek to follow.

Amen.