

Over the last several months, it has been such a joy getting to know you all...watching the evolution of our time together expand from that very silent and very awkward meeting downstairs in the Parish House...the one where we had to send you up to the church to find to commonalities...and start talking... to our time in Burlington.

We originally planned confirmation before we realized it was going to be Palm Sunday, and then decided to roll with it.

It just seemed right that a day we celebrate Jesus' humble yet triumphant entry into Jerusalem would also serve as a day to welcome this amazing group of individuals into the next step of your role in this church.

Through your statements of faith, and more importantly through your actions, you've proven yourselves eager and qualified to live a life of discipleship, and we are proud to celebrate you and call you our own.

At the same time, Palm Sunday is not Easter. It is a celebration, but carries a sharp warning. If you listen over the hosannas of the crowd, you hear something far more sinister gaining in volume. **Youth: Crucify him. (start softer, get louder three times)**

A far more sorrowful sound reaches our ears... **Were you there...(Marcia - sung)**

Palm Sunday is a giant contradiction... Jesus enters Jerusalem to the cheers of an adoring crowd, and just four days later, the crowd calls for his death.

He spoke truth to power, brought light to darkness, and cast out the greedy from the temple...and for this, he would be betrayed and denied.

Why do you think the crowd turned on him?

I would argue that a great deal of the crowd's actions were likely due to the intimidation of the ruling powers...both the occupying Romans and the Pharisees who went along with them. They were fearful subjects of a brutal regime.

Supporting someone is a lot easier when you don't have to worry about being punished for it...even if you know speaking up for them is the right thing to do.

I'm fearful that we see this in our world today, and it's scary.

We are witnessing first-hand the effects of a ruling class that is willing to seek retribution against their perceived enemies, and punish people for speaking the truth.

Just this week, a lawyer who admitted that an administrative error led to an innocent man's imprisonment in El Salvador was placed on leave... charged with not zealously advocating for his government. For simply telling the truth.

We hear the call approaching... **Youth: Crucify him. (start softer, get louder three times)**

We see the crowd turning, fearful of their own persecution. Saving themselves.

In this climate we tend to shy away from things that are controversial, which really means we're afraid of the consequence of speaking up.

Jesus asks "could you not stay awake with me for one hour"... and the answer is "no".

True discipleship is changing that "no" to a "yes", even when it's tough. It's recognizing the path of truth and light that Jesus sets us on, and following it boldly, no matter the consequence.

It's also recognizing who your allies are, even if they seem unlikely.

Maggie Kuhn loved every second of her job. She was forced to retire at age 65 due to mandatory retirement laws, and she did not stay quiet.

She founded the Gray Panthers, an organization that was committed to opposing age discrimination, and advancing the rights of our elders.

Old age, stated Kuhn, was not a disease, it was an achievement. She worked to build a coalition of younger and older Philadelphians, speaking truth to power.

If you look out into this congregation today, there are quite a few disciples of Maggie Kuhn...

voices to guide you through the darkness who have been there before, who have seen the same struggles, and have fought the same temptations.

Part of the magic of this church is getting to know them.

Kuhn says this:

"Leave safety behind. Put your body on the line.

Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind – even if your voice shakes.
When you least expect it, someone may actually listen to what you have to say.
Well-aimed slingshots can topple giants. And do your homework.”

You have started down that road. Your deep commitment to your faith. Your gifts of talent,
of music, of the joy of your presence. Of your curiosity, of knowing your limits.

Your advocacy for a man who needed you to help preserve the dignity of getting himself to
the grocery store in a snowstorm.

All of that helps to keep the crowd focused on the truth and light, to keep your voice
focused on the hosannas, not the jeers.

Keeping strong in faith means following the path of Jesus, standing up for those who can't
always stand for themselves.

Martin Neimoller was a German minister who originally got lost in the crowd.

He was a strong supporter of the Nazi party, and like many Germans believed that the Nazis
would provide strong leadership to make Germany a powerful and respected nation once
again.

At one point, he declared Adolf Hitler “an instrument sent by God”.

He slowly became uncomfortable with the control Hitler had over the churches, and started
speaking out against the Nazis.

For this, despite his earlier support, he was imprisoned in a concentration camp as a “threat
to society”.

After his release, Neimoller wrote this poem:

First they came for the Communists
 And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
 Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
 Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists
 And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
 Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out

Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me

Friends, celebrating your confirmation on Palm Sunday is a momentous occasion.

You all have the skills, mindset and tools to be true followers of Jesus, resisters of oppression, agents of positive change in the world.

When Jesus asks “will you stay with me”, may you always answer “yes”,
may you always fight for light and love
as if your life depended on it...
because someday, it will.