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Parades and processions can be great fun—especially ones that include all generations.

There were parades and marches in Seattle and across the country yesterday, and some of you were there…

And today, we join another parade—this one with JESUS at the center.

A NOISY, BOISTEROUS, CROSS-GENERATIONAL PARADE into the city of Jerusalem with branches, drums, shakers, and shouts of HOSANNA!

IMAGINE being part of that singing, dancing crowd—

…waving branches and laying down blankets along his path…

…feeling your pulse rise as you shouted—HOSANNA! HOSANNA!

…**being caught up in the excitement as Jesus winds his way down the Mount of Olives and into Jerusalem through the East gate.**

Can you SEE yourself there with THEM—with HIM?

- THE ONE who makes the lame walk and the blind see…
- THE ONE who welcomes with open arms those who others call WORTHLESS…
- THE ONE who instead of "SHUSHING" children, PULLS THEM ONTO HIS LAP and tells the grownups that TO UNDERSTAND HOW GOD SEES, YOU NEED TO LOOK THROUGH THE EYES OF THESE LITTLE ONES.

Truth be told, you don't always understand exactly what he means—this teacher who speaks in riddles and parables.

But you KNOW he's on your side—which means that GOD is on your side, too.

And even if you can't always track what he's saying, the glint in his eye tells you that you and he are IN IT TOGETHER, and that YOU MATTER.

So when you hear about this man—what he's done, what he's taught—and when you learn that he's coming into the Holy City with a crowd of followers, and that a parade is forming…

WELL OF COURSE you would want to be part of it, wouldn't you?

And so would I.

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BUT HERE'S THE THING…

In order for us to understand what THE PARADE with Jesus on THIS SIDE of town is really about, we have to understand what THE PARADE taking place on the OTHER SIDE of town is about.

FOR THE TRUTH IS, there were TWO PARADES taking place that year as pilgrims flocked to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival.[1]

- **ONE with Jesus at the center,** with his rag-tag bunch of followers, riding down the Mount of Olives on top of two donkeys—how awkward would THAT be!
  A parade attended by misfits and cast off's; ne're do wells and barefooted children.[2]

- **AND THE OTHER with the Roman governor Pontius Pilate at the center,**
  entering the city at the head of a column of IMPERIAL CAVALRY,
  trumpets blaring, swords glinting, horse hooves pounding.

Yes, we must imagine TWO processions that day…
- One a PEASANT procession, the other an IMPERIAL procession.
- One with CHILDREN bearing palm branches.
- And another with SOLDIERS bearing weapons.

Pontius Pilate—whose reputation for ruthlessness exceeded even what ROME endorsed—made this trek each year from his comfortable quarters in Caesaria by the Sea for ONE REASON ONLY:
- to insure that order prevailed during the greatest Passover Festival,
  when the population of the city swelled to many times its normal count.

PILOT'S PROCESSION was a display not only of Roman imperial power but also of Roman imperial theology.

According to that theology the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome—he was the SON OF GOD—the LORD & SAVIOR who brought PEACE TO EARTH.[3]

So, dear friends, if we are to understand the story that Matthew is telling this morning, we need to know that story's counterpoint.

[1] See description in *The Last Week,* by M Borg and J. D. Crossan
[2] Peter Macdonald. Palm Sunday sermon, April 2014, at Iona Abbey.
[3] *The Last Week*, p. 3

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And knowing that RIVAL STORY—knowing THE TERMS under which that other procession enters Jerusalem—we can now see Jesus' parade for what it is:

- **A PARODY—absurd and subversive…**
- **A PARADE through the back door rather than the main gate…**
- **Led by an UNARMED MAN who sits NOT ON A STALLION but on a DONKEY that's been rented by the hour…attended by prodigals and snot-nosed kids.[4]**

This parade of Jesus and his misfit companions is a PARODY of Pilate's presidential motorcade, and THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR:

- There is no endorsement of "might makes right"…
- No embrace of Superpower tactics...
- No prayer for "overwhelming violence" against the ungodly…

RATHER…

- **If Jesus is king, pretenders need not apply—the position is filled.**
- **If Jesus is king, all dictators are de-throned, and even Pilate—sated as he is with power—will have no power over him.**

THIS, dear friends, is how this Holy Week begins.

And in its costly unfolding, you and I have a choice to make…

WHICH PARADE WILL WE BE JOINING?

St. Paul, writing from prison to the beleaguered community he'd planted in Philippi, turned to the words of an early hymn to invite them—and us—along the way of Jesus:

> "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others," he wrote. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave…and humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."[5]

Many scholars believe that Paul wrote these words in Rome about the time Nero began tossing Christians to ravenous lions.[6]

The gospel couldn't be more clear. The way of Jesus, the road to the life that TRULY IS LIFE, must go through the cross.

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[4] This image from Peter McDonald op. cit.
[5] Philippians 2
[6] *The New Student Study Bible,* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990) Introductory notes to Philippians, page 1124.

LET US PRAY… Lord, 2,000 years later we're still learning what following you requires; what loving our enemies looks like. In this complex world, layered with so much that is wrong, you call us to fall in step with you…to bind our hopes to your promise that death is not the end but a door that opens to a whole new world.

As we listen, now, to the story of your final hours, how you drank the cup of suffering to the dregs and experienced the godforsakenness that so many in our world experience, increase our faith that—through the power of your risen life—change is possible; a world without war is possible; a common good is attainable. In your name we pray. Amen.