

Respond to God's call

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Palm Sunday

Today, we march again behind the one who started all the Palm Sunday peace rallies – our King, Jesus. He marched in the face of the greatest military power earth had known. Jesus marched on an occupied city mounted on an awkward little beast of burden instead of a war-horse. And he marched not at the head of an army, but supported by a hopeful rabble of women, men and children.

We join those women, men and children who marched with him then, and the countless millions who've done so since. We march with the poor benighted Christians of today's Holy Land who'd march if they could. But their road is yet again watched by threatening soldiers and now blocked by a wall. And if we can imagine it, we march today in a procession which is embracing the world, hour by hour as the sun rises on a new place; pilgrims, not soldiers, armed only with cries of mingled hope and pain, calling for peace, and after all these years, still calling the forces of violence and oppression to repent.

Like us, those first pilgrims marched with Jesus on the eve of a festival – for them it was Passover; for us, Holy Week and Easter. Their festival celebrated the ancient Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt. Our festival celebrates a rescue from the slavery of fear and isolation too – the very rescue that first Palm Sunday crowd cried out for. But the rescue didn't happen in the way they expected. They cried out for rescue from the new slavery that oppressed them; Roman soldiers garrisoned beside their temple. They expected armed conflict.

Jesus did confront their oppressors. But instead of meeting

violence with violence, he met it with the only thing that could bring about its end. He held firm to an incorruptible reverence for God's passion for justice, mercy and forgiveness. And in doing so, he embodied the Peace of God.

What Jesus did exposed the shameful emptiness of the addiction to power and influence that still afflicts the world. What he offered us all, even his persecutors, was a vision of a whole human being. He was tortured and murdered but remained whole. Ultimately, by his choice to give his life for all people – for you and me too – Jesus transformed death. The grave could not hold such grace and peace. He rose, he lives, and we follow him.

We follow Jesus because he is the one who taught us how to truly honour life. He did it by giving his life away freely, instead of devaluing it by clinging to it through compromise. We follow Jesus because he is the one who taught us how to break a cycle of violence by letting evil expose itself rather than by meeting it with force. We follow Jesus because he's the one who cherishes us when we're brought low; he's the one who's with us even when we're alone. We respond to his love which can adore us even when we cannot love ourselves. We follow Jesus because he loves us, and he calls us each by name.

Responding to his call can seem like that first Palm Sunday. It can seem that he's calling us to certain failure; calling us to follow him to something that won't make the slightest difference. Yet when we respond to his call we discover ourselves to be the person *he* believes us to be. He *believes in us*. As his disciples, we'll become more like him; we'll become whole. If we follow him – let him transform us into the people he believes in – then our wholeness will be his instrument of freeing others whom he calls too.

Palm Sunday marchers are pilgrims on the way to wholeness – on the way to the peace of God. We are pilgrims marching to help

rescue all God's creatures from slavery to fear and isolation.
We march as pilgrims in the company of Jesus – our guide, our
example, our friend, and our God. Amen