

## Walking into Jerusalem

Palm Sunday  
April 9, 2017

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### Food for Thought

*from an essay entitled "Engagement" by Terry Tempest Williams*

The human heart is the first home of democracy. The human heart is where we embrace our questions. Can we be equitable? Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds, and offer our attention rather than our opinions? And do we have enough resolve in our hearts to act courageously, relentlessly, without giving up—ever—trusting our fellow citizens to join with us in our determined pursuit of a living democracy?

The heart is the house of empathy whose door opens when we receive the pain of others. This is where bravery lives, where we find our mettle to give and receive, to love and be loved, to stand in the center of uncertainty with strength, not fear, understanding this is all there is. The heart is the path to wisdom because it dares to be vulnerable in the presence of power.

### Scripture Reading: Mark 11:1-11 (*New Revised Standard Version*)

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'"

They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Then Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Once upon a time, I was driving back to Eureka from the Bay Area in the rain. It was very difficult to see; it was dark. I was approaching Eureka but not yet within the city lights. Water was splashing up from the road and falling from the clouds that just seemed to be relaxing on the ground. Then, far ahead of me I saw the big red “S” on the back of a Safeway truck—light in the darkness. So there I am following this Safeway truck, and that big red “S” is for *safe way*, and is taking on a new meaning for me driving on I-5.

It's raining and I'm trusting that truck driver. I've still got my hands on the wheel of my car, my foot on the gas, and ready for the brake. I still have to watch for other cars and deer. I'm still aware of the passengers that I'm responsible for. And so while I direct my life and make my choices there is still a deeper ultimate trust that gives me a deeper security.

As I entered the lights of Eureka and I felt I could make it without the Safeway truck, and I could go a little faster, I pulled into the left hand lane, and as I passed the truck I flashed my high beams three times in thanks. Who was I thanking? The Safeway truck driver. . . and God, for sending me the truck driver. Thank God for sending us a light in the darkness, a way of life! Which brings me to Palm Sunday.

In the time of Jesus, Jerusalem had a population estimated between forty thousand and seventy thousand. It was also occupied by a garrison of Roman troops who needed reinforcements at the major Jewish holidays to cope with the throngs of Jewish pilgrims. Thus, at the season of Passover, Roman troops arrived at Jerusalem from the west in a procession led by the Roman governor, accompanied by all the trappings of imperial power. Jesus and his followers arrived from the east, possibly on the same day.

Imagine two parades. Imagine two people standing on a rooftop in the center of the city, watching the Romans with all of their glistening armor and horses. Then they see another parade entering from the opposite side of the city—a rag-tag peasant gathering led by a young man, on a young donkey. One man says to the other, “Who is this? Who is that guy?” His friend answers, “How am I supposed to know? He’s got a lot of people around, not the best dressed crowd I’ve ever seen, but they sure seem excited about something. Hey, I wonder if that is... I don’t remember his name, but I just heard something about a guy who raised someone named Lazarus from the grave.” The first man responds, “What? You’ve got to be kidding me!” “Yeah, this guy Lazarus had been buried four days; the whole family and village were mourning, and a good friend—maybe it was this guy; I think his name is Yeshua—went to the tomb, comforted the family, even while he was crying himself. Then he called out ‘Lazarus!!’ and somehow Lazarus comes up out of the grave. Jesus told the people to unbind him and let him go.” “Well, all I can see is that a lot of people are following him, whoever he is. Maybe he’s just another one of those would-be Messiahs from the wilderness. Let's go see what's happening. It looks like he is headed for the temple.” “I don’t know. How about those Roman soldiers? Look at all those magnificent horses and the sun shining off their armor. Don't follow the Romans; all they know how to do is destroy. Jesus knows how to bring back life.”

The differences between the parades are striking and clear. One is powerful and strikes fear in the weak. One is humble and strikes fear in the powerful. It is interesting to note the significance of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey. We see it simply as a symbol of humility, but it is more than that. It is also a condemnation of the Jewish authorities who misuse their power. If you read the prophet Zechariah you will see it prophesied that when the Messiah comes into Jerusalem, if he enters on a horse, it will be a blessing on Jerusalem that it has lived up to its covenant with God. If however the Messiah enters Jerusalem on a donkey, it will be a judgment upon the religious and political authorities that they have not kept the covenant. After all of the *hallelujahs* have been shouted, after the crowds have placed their palm fronds on the road in front of Jesus, what does he do and say? In Luke 19:41 we read:

As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for Peace!"

Let's return to the two men on the rooftop. "Hey, look at him. He is crying. This is one unusual leader. He is crying for Jerusalem. Oh, he's getting up now, he is going into the temple. Let's go see. I need to buy some things from one of the merchants in there anyway. Let's go see." "O brother, look. I hope you didn't want to buy a little sparrow. This guy is turning over all the tables of all of the merchants. He is saying that they are supporting the robbers in the temple. Is he calling the priests robbers? Boy, first he marches into town on the same day as the Romans, but comes in on a donkey rather than with military power, and now he is turning out the merchants. Who does this guy think he is? Some kind of peacenik anti-capitalist?" "I don't know, but I am going stay close for awhile longer. This is going to be good. It's kind of cool they way he stuck it to the Romans and the temple priests, isn't it? They didn't even realize it. And I guess I never liked those money-changers in the temple. It always made it so hard for the poor people to pray. Whoever this Jesus is he sure has a great amount of courage and authority to stand up to the Romans and the temple priests." "Yeah, I wonder where he gets it from. Jesus handled those questions from the scribes really well. You know what I liked best? When he saw that little old lady dropping a couple of coins into the offering basket, and he said that those coins were a bigger gift than all of the wealthy elites letting everybody know how much they give to the temple, that was great. Hey, what's he saying now?" "He and his disciples are going back to Bethany to spend the night before coming back to the temple. Shall we go with him?" "I don't know; what do you think?" "He's looking at us; he is saying we can come too. He's invited us. Shall we go with him?"

*Choosing to follow.* It's an interesting phrase. Choosing to follow the lights of the Safeway truck, I made it safely home through a rainy and frightening night. Choosing to follow the teachings of Jesus isn't always safe. But it is the way of *life* in troubling times.

I want to close the message this morning with the quote from Terry Tempest Williams:

The heart is the house of empathy whose door opens when we receive the pain of others. This is where bravery lives, where we find our mettle to give and receive, to love and be loved, to stand in the center of uncertainty with strength, not fear, understanding this is all there is. The heart is the path to wisdom because it dares to be vulnerable in the presence of power.

This is the path that we have chosen to follow. These same thoughts are echoed by Jack Kornfield in an article in the current Spirit Rock News.

Start just here. Tune into your heart. That is where love, wisdom, grace, and compassion reside. With loving attention, feel into what matters most to you. Yes, there are anxious thoughts, and there is grief and trauma, but don't let your heart be colonized by fear. Take time to quiet the mind and tend to the heart. Go out and look at the sky. Breathe in and open yourself to the vastness of space. Sense the seasons turning, the rise and fall of dynasties and eras. You can contribute. You have your heart, your voice, and your spirit. Be strategic and strong. Your presence is an expression of the wisdom you carry. Through your steadfastness, compassion, and deep values, you become dedicated to compassion no matter what. You can stand up for the environment, for immigrants, for whatever is in front of you and needs your care and attention. People are hungry, so you feed them. Someone is hurt, so you bring whatever healing you can. You stand with the poor and the vulnerable. Together, let us tie our shoelaces and walk in the direction of truth.

Let us prepare the way for peace, as we enter these times that we are living in.