

March 25, 2018 – Journey worship service

TEXT: Mark 11:1–11

TITLE: Beyond the Leafy Branches

THEME: Wilderness

By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

Maya Angelo is quoted as saying: “Words are things, I’m convinced. They get in your wallpaper. They get in your rugs, in your upholstery, in your clothes, and finally, into you. We must be careful about the words we use. Someday we will be able to measure the power of words.”

That particular quote has haunted me for a number of weeks now. When I think about the power of words; words can and do change lives, perspectives and hearts, situations and legislation. However, words that are left unspoken can be just as—when you’ve finally found the courage to tell someone “I love you,” but they don’t reply; when someone is so overcome with emotion, good or bad, they can’t find the words to express what they are feeling; legislation that isn’t written, because law makers don’t have the fortitude to stand up to their various funders and constituents. Words have sunken ships, relationships, countries, presidencies, started war, and words have saved lives, restored relationships, empowered countries and ushered in peace. Maya Angelou is right, “words are things, they get into our wallpaper, rugs, upholstery, clothes and finally, into us!”

The writer of the Gospel of Mark knew the importance of words. In comparison to the other Gospels, Mark used fewer words to communicate and also used the words of the Old Testament writers, words his hearers would understand. In Mark 11, the first 11 verses, uses a total of 235 words to describe what is known as Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Of those 235 words, 78 described in great detail, what and how two disciples were to acquire the colt upon which Jesus would enter into Jerusalem upon. Jesus’ words, his instructions, took on life, they became incarnate before everyone’s eyes, as just as he had described the unriden colt was secured and brought back to him.

Yesterday, while watching the March for Our Lives in Washington D.C., listening to youth eloquently share their stories, and convictions, their determination, I was moved by their strength, their power, their resolve, their ability to simply, yet effectively communicate to the proverbial adults who have the power to enact sensible gun laws, that enough is enough, that not another child should be fearful of going to school or standing in their neighborhood, or in the mall or any other place and fear being struck down physically or emotionally by gun violence. I listened as Emma Gonzalez spoke and then stood in silence for 6 minutes and 20 seconds to illustrate the amount of time it took for 17 of her friends and teachers to be killed, 15 others injured and everyone else’s lives to be completely altered.

I am struck by Mark’s Gospel in that after Jesus instructed his disciples concerning the acquisition of the colt in the village, Jesus goes silent. We hear the voice of the disciples

relaying the message that they are taking the colt because the Lord has need of it, and will send it back immediately. And if we use our sanctified imaginations, we hear the loud cries of the crowd as they went ahead and followed Jesus, some hurriedly laying cloaks and leaves on the road for Jesus to cross over into Jerusalem. We hear the shouts of “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! “

Reminiscent of the hymn often sung on Good Friday, “he never said a mumbling word” Jesus, the Word incarnate has gone silent, and yet his actions speak loudly. Entering into Jerusalem on the colt, rather than by foot, as was the custom during Passover, denoted his kingship, reminiscent of Zechariah's prophesy (9:9)—“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The shouts of the people were reminiscent of Psalm 118:25,26: when the people of God cried out: “Hosanna, save, help us, we beseech you, O Lord! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! We bless you from the house of the LORD. The LORD is God, and God has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.” Yet, now the people cried Hosanna as a shout of hope and exaltation. And Jesus stays silent, his actions at were speaking louder than any words he might have spoken, just as the beggar, Blind Bartimaeus, in chapter 10 of Mark, even in his blindness, had more insight than Jesus’ disciples, as by faith Bartimaeus believed Jesus would restore his sight.

Blind faith, is what we witnessed exemplified and expressed by the youth as they marched on Washington DC and all across the country yesterday. Blind faith that one voice, one witness, one challenge, one vote can make a difference. Blind determination, calling out and on those in power to do what is right, and just and practical, to enact sensible gun legislation rather than continuing to bow to the NRA and gun manufacturers. And yet the loudest voice in the nation yesterday, was the one that fell silent for a little over six minutes to illustrate the time it took to alter the trajectory of so many lives. That deafening silence spoke volumes and is the silence that descends every time a life is taken by gun violence in schools, neighborhoods, homes, movie theaters... (*one minute of silence*)

Words are powerful; they take on a life of their own. Words have the power to destroy and to encourage, comfort, to prophesy to the future and pronounce peace, and so does silence. There are times when silence is stronger than any spoken word.

Jesus silently rode to Jerusalem and then silently, he went to the temple and looked around. Then Jesus and his disciples departed to Bethany for the night. In silence, Jesus looked beyond everything that had happened before: the questioning disciples, the unbelieving and cynical scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees; in silence, Jesus looked beyond the rich man and all those he had healed. Jesus looked beyond the pomp and circumstance of cloaks thrown on the ground, and leaves waving in the air.

Jesus looked beyond the celebratory shouts of Hosanna that would soon become angry shouts of crucify him! Jesus looked beyond the Temple where people gathered to worship, to the inauguration of the new Temple that would be destroyed and raised back up on the third day. Jesus looked beyond to Calvary—the place where death is transformed to life; the place where brokenness leads to wholeness; the place where darkness is overshadowed by light; and the place where worldly power is reduced to nothingness and the sovereignty of God rules and reigns.

Amen