Meditation – "The Long Walk Home"
Scripture Reading - Luke 19:28-40
Palm Sunday, April 13, 2025
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Our scripture reading is Luke 19:28-40. Throughout Lent we have walked with Jesus, beginning with entering the wilderness and now ending with entering Jerusalem. In contrast with the quiet desolation of the wilderness, this entry is marked not only by the noise of the city but also by disciples shouting. "Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!" For those who had journeyed with Jesus and envisioned who Jesus would be for them; it has been a long walk home, and for those who had been sustained by Jesus' words along the way; it was a time to speak, and shout and sing! This is the Word of God.

*After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As Jesus rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As Jesus was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." Amen.*

The title of the meditation: "The Long Walk Home"

*The text: After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. Luke 19:28*

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Jesus' long walk home culminates with his entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday prior to the last supper, trial, crucifixion and resurrection. As he enters the city, the crowds welcome him with praise and adoration. When some of the Pharisees ask Jesus to order them to stop, Jesus' response is a poignant reminder of a truth we have witnessed throughout history; namely, that people's voices ultimately cannot be silenced, stifled, or suppressed.

Following the bitter debate in 1787 over the ratification of the United States Constitution, James Madison among others sought to improve the document by proposing its first ten amendments now known as the Bill of Rights. The Enlightenment themes of liberty, equality, and reason would lead our founders to put forth the first and foremost right as free speech. The education of the people, the public debate of ideas, and the open criticism of leadership are essential to a healthy democracy. Over the years and today, when authorities within our imperfect democracy try to silence people's cry for greater justice, it makes their voices stronger and more determined.

"The Long Walk Home" is a 1990 American film set in Montgomery, Alabama during the 1955 bus boycott in response to Rosa Parks' arrest for refusing to give up her seat to a white man. After 381 days of long walks home by African Americans, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on public buses was unconstitutional. The Kieffer family celebrated this landmark Supreme Court victory by watching this film every Martin Luther King Weekend after marching together.

The film offers the perspective of an African American woman, Odessa, who works as a maid across town and the woman for whom she works, Miriam. Miriam begins her own long, walk home in the ethical dilemma she faces amid the oppression that has been a way of life for many generations. Her journey begins with a simple act of kindness, providing Odessa a ride two days a week to lessen the fatigue of her "long walks home." Ultimately, Miriam decides to hold on to what is right, becomes involved in a carpool group to help other black workers like Odessa. In the film's final scene, Miriam and her daughter join Odessa and other protesters standing against oppression.

The Long Walk Home film is an exploration of the human spirit, the psychological and physical toll of extreme endurance, the lengths people will go to survive, and the choices and responsibility we each have to bend the arc toward justice. Whether it is through the words one speaks or the miles one walks (putting one foot in front of the other), voices for justice and truth will not be silenced.

As Jesus proclaimed on his long walk home to the cross. *I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out*. Luke's gospel alone records these faith-filled words of Christ. Here is faith in the sure triumph of God. Here is a truth too good to have its mouth shut. It may be temporarily silenced, but not for long. If disciples fall away by cowardice or complacence, God will raise up more! As John the Baptism said in his message by the Jordan: *God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham*. (Luke 3:8)

In the prophet Isaiah we learn that the children of Abraham enduring exile in Babylon are strengthened through the tongue of a teacher in the words of the suffering servant: *The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word*. (Isaiah 50:4)

According to theologian James Newsome: *To "sustain" does not mean simply to speak a gentle word of consolation. It means…to speak a reality that counters the weariness, an alternative way to see the world, which creates space, freedom, and energy.*

And so, *a word to sustain the weary* is the theological assertion that gives voice to new possibilities outside the repressive realities and invites the weary to change the way they see themselves, and therefore, the way they live their lives.

Throughout his ministry, Christ spoke a word to sustain the weary, not simply a word of consolation but a new reality of how to view oneself and the world. It is no coincidence that Christians around the world reference this suffering servant passage in Isaiah every Palm Sunday. Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem on his long walk home with words of gratitude from his followers for changing the way they viewed the world. It was a time to speak, shout, and sing. Jesus would not and could not silence the good news.

Jesus also knew that the good news would provoke resistance and hostility from those in power. Christ—the suffering servant met the hostility of the world with peaceful nonresistance and in so doing revealed not only the cruelty of the world's ways but also the mystery of God's ways—whose love is stronger than the hatred of the world. The God to whom we belong in life and in death is the God who chose the long walk home and conquered death by dying on a cross. Amen.