
I Just Love a Parade

A sermon by Canon Beth Knowlton

I have come to believe there are two types of people in the world. Those who love Disney World, and those who consider it a special and particular form of torture to even contemplate going to the Magic Kingdom.

For those who would rather endure severe penance than enter through Main Street USA to catch a glimpse of Cinderella's castle, you have my compassion and understanding. All the things you are thinking are true. It is, in fact, overcrowded, expensive beyond belief, and bound to result in at least one family fight resulting from hunger, dehydration, or extreme fatigue. If you take it even further there is probably even the ever looming question of the corporate ethics of the company in a post-Walt era.

These are all true.

But, I love Disney World.

All the valid concerns I have just listed melt away each time I enter the gates. I can't get there early enough and want to make sure I am there when the train arrives with Mickey and Minnie and the gates are first open. My husband and I went long before we had children and have gone at least ten of the past twelve Thanksgivings in a tradition as dear to our family as any Turkey laden table. I love the rides, I love the shows, I love the fireworks, and I LOVE the Electric Light Parade.

The Electric Light Parade is always at the end of a very long day. Some years I have already delivered some of our crowd back to the hotel and returned with other true believers. Some years I find a spot to watch, and others I watch it while on the move. I love the grandeur of the music, the sighting of favorite childhood characters, and the feeling I get when I see so much light in procession. My heart swells, and I always find my eyes a bit moist, despite my children's amusement. Because you see, I just love a parade.

A parade to me is a metaphor of journey. It is a gathering of people to join with one another in a common purpose. We had them all across the country this week to celebrate the Fourth of July. We have them when people who have done great things return, and we have them to send people off to new adventures. And sometimes we have them just for fun.

As I have reflected back on my most dear moments here at the Cathedral for the past eight years, many of them involve a parade. The Great Litany in procession, Palm Sunday, the Easter Vigil, weddings, funerals, and of course every Sunday service. I love them all. Whether they begin with shouts of Hosanna or end with "Welcome Happy Morning," I just love a parade.

But the parades would not mean much if they were not connected to the deeper journey of faith. They represent the call by God to gather for worship, to set out with one another, sometimes into the unknown. Parades are how we practice for the greater walk of faith.

In Genesis today we are reminded of journey. We are reminded that Abraham had to leave all that he knew to find the fulfillment of God's promises. But to leave is not the same as forgetting. He remains forever rooted to his homeland. When

he must find a wife for his dear son Isaac, he returns to his roots. He sends a trusted servant back to his homeland to find the next person to join the journey.

For the story to continue, Rebekah is the one who has to consent to leave what she knows. She is the one setting out, walking to the new. Isaac has remained in place, but we know he has had his own journey up a mountain with his father Abraham.

The journey continues throughout scripture, the wandering in the desert, the clarion call of the prophets when the journey has gone astray, the disciple's willingness to follow Jesus, the road to the Garden of Gethsemane, the cross, and the empty tomb. To be a person of faith is to consent to being on the move.

It is not easy. At least for most of us. We love our patterns and our habits. We love the familiarity of place and people. It can be hard to take the risk and move away. Which is why we practice every time we enter worship. It is in the familiar rhythm of the service that we are reminded of the broader journey. We enter, we gather, we pray, we hear the larger story of the journey we participate in, and we gather at the table with one another, we leave and go out to serve God.

When the Dean asked me whether I wanted to preach or celebrate today, I told him I thought I'd better preach. I needed a contained moment to say farewell. I wasn't sure I could make it through celebrating the full service without breaking down. Because I knew the liturgy will always get me. And I love you all too much to trust myself to stand behind that altar and ask you to lift up your hearts.

The heart of the Eucharist really is about gaining sustenance and giving thanks. And that invitation to lift our hearts that extends back through the centuries is a powerful reminder of the invitation of the journey of faith. Some days we come with heavy hearts, and it is only through the faith of the community that we can answer that we offer our hearts to God. Some days we are distracted, and it might be that familiar invitation is what brings our attention back to the table. Other days we are filled with joy and our hearts may be close to bursting as we offer them to God.

Whatever the case, we offer them. It is in the offering that our journey is knit ever more closely with the greater story of the people of God.

We are promised if we have the courage to do so, we will find a new way of walking. It is the promise we hear in the gospel today. Jesus may be getting our attention in a rather heated way, but he is earnestly reminding us that we do not walk alone. That we cannot walk alone.

To trust in oneself it to become burdened with the heavy load of pride and control. We are asked to let that go and find a different way of walking. A yoke that will cause us to shoulder our burdens in a way that cannot be done if we are hauling the load by ourselves. Because it is Christ who carries the weight of the burden. We are asked to learn how to walk in that way, with him by our side.

But it is harder to walk with someone than by ourselves. We don't naturally fall into the same rhythm. If you don't believe me watch the exiting parade each Sunday. Some days we do it with more grace than others, and sometimes I think we are just lucky we have found our way out for the dismissal. But there is a secret. The times it works is when our eyes meet before we make the turn and march out together. It is when we have gazed at Christ that we can trust the yolk he offers and find his path.

There is no way to conclude this sermon other than to offer my own great thanksgiving to this community and all that it has given me. You have been the ones who have lifted my heart on countless occasions with your faithfulness, your joy, and your love. It is you who give me the courage to be reminded that God may have called me beyond what is familiar, but that I can trust that calling. Because we once were strangers and now I can call you friends.

Meister Eckhart said if the only prayer we say in our entire lives is thank you, it will suffice. I can trust in the truth of that as I say with a full heart, thank you.

Amen.

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