

“Dare to Care: Action on a Large Scale”
Luke 19:28-44

Today we reach Jerusalem with Jesus as he prepares for his final action there. Jesus makes a dramatic entry into Jerusalem to get the attention of those who are watching and to send a strong message to the whole city. I want you to think of dramatic entrances that you have seen or experienced in your life. Maybe it was a wedding or a graduation ceremony. Think back on what happens on such occasions. There is usually dramatic music, an audience, a stage of some sort, preparation and anticipation, and a procession. Such entrances make an impression and get people to pay attention. Take this entrance of a pastor that went viral last year:

<https://youtu.be/GQMgfKgt65E>

The pastor comes flying in on a zip line at Brown Baptist Church in Mississippi! He was trying to illustrate a point about Jesus’ return and everyone paid attention and even people who didn’t attend the worship heard about it. Talk about a dramatic entry! And so as we look at our Palm Sunday story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, we see a very dramatic entrance into the city. Jesus was trying to amplify his message in order to reform his whole community and country. In the long tradition of ancient Israel’s prophets, Jesus was interested in the soul of his country. He wanted to see God’s compassion be the centerpiece of the social systems of his time.

Jesus prepared for his entrance into Jerusalem so that it could be very dramatic and memorable. He didn’t just show up. He actually set up the whole scene of the parade in intentional ways. (Read Luke 19:28-44) That is what prophets did in those days. Jerusalem was often the scene of such prophetic street theater to help people to pay attention. Jesus had already set up what animal he would ride and had sent his disciples to the house of the person who owned the donkey. And the parade was his way of getting people to pay attention to this message and to get the city officials to listen to this challenge. People would have known about the Prefect’s (Pilate’s) entrance into Jerusalem.

This was what they had come to expect. Each year while the Jews were preparing to celebrate their festival of freedom (their 4th of July), their occupiers, the Romans paraded into Jerusalem to remind them that they were under their control. So Jesus could not have picked a more volatile time and occasion to enter into Jerusalem. He was going for the big stage. And the details of the story are rife with symbols of hope for his people such as the location of the parade, the animal he rode, the chants, and the crowd of his followers.

This was Jesus’ large-scale action to help spread his message. He knew the cost of such action, but he also knew the importance of such an action. His message needed to challenge and transform the systems of the world into the ways of compassion.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is all about the transformation of the whole of society into God’s vision of compassion. While it is important for us to be compassionate in our day-


to-day interactions, we cannot forget about the importance of transforming the systems of our society. This kind of action is hard for us as we would prefer focusing on small-scale acts of compassion. It is hard to engage each other about compassion on a large scale without challenging the status quo where profit is often put above compassion and where violence is used to threaten and subdue people who threaten the status quo. The political divisions that exist in our society often mislead us into believing that compassion on a large scale is impossible. Most of our human systems are set up to always have winners and losers. In order to change that, we must change our assumptions and principles. Jesus offers compassion as the large-scale assumption for our social systems. Spending our energy on political divisions often shifts our focus from wrestling with the big issues and how we might imagine a world where compassion is the guiding principle.

Another challenge for us is that we also don't see a lot of models in our culture for large-scale and systemic compassion. It is important to lift up the example of Jesus in his humility, nonviolence, and courage to invite others to join us in a movement for compassion. Jesus offers us a new vision for our world and for our lives; a vision that is alternative to the ways we normally see and do things. Jesus shows us a great example of how to work for compassion on a large scale.

I would like to highlight a movement that started in 2008 by someone who followed in the footsteps of Jesus. In 2008 writer and speaker Karen Armstrong won the TED Prize in the amount of 1 Million dollars and the expertise of a wide community to make a bold wish come true. Her wish was to help make compassion a reality in our world where people would live by the principle of the Golden Rule. And out of that wish, the Charter for Compassion was born. Here is Karen Armstrong speaking about her vision: <https://youtu.be/DCG4qyy1Dg>.

The amazing thing is that her wish and her vision created a movement in our world that is still going strong. People from all over the world submitted ideas on what the charter would include. I recently connected with a couple of local chapters in our area where people are working together to make their cities compassionate cities. In February of this year one of the local chapters has succeeded in having their city adopt a resolution to designate their city as a Charter for Compassion city. This was in Olean, NY. I know that Brockport is going through a similar process.

The implications are huge for such a commitment to help dynamics of compassion on a larger scale. The Charter for Compassion in Olean also invited us to join them for a special day on June 13th in Chautauqua (screen).



2ND SAVE THE DATE

Thursday June 13, 2019
8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
In the Athenaeum Hotel
at Chautauqua Institution
Chautauqua, NY

THE OLEAN AREA CHARTER FOR COMPASSION
AND CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION PRESENT:

**CULTIVATING COMPASSION
IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

Keynote speaker: **Marilyn Turkovich**,
Director Charter for Compassion International

I am hoping that some of us could go and learn more to see if God is calling us to do something here in Batavia. If you are interested, please let me know.

As we prepare to journey with Jesus through this Holy Week, I invite you to pray and consider how God is calling you and all of us to embody compassion through action on a large scale. Here is a video presentation of the Charter for Compassion: <https://youtu.be/wktlwCPDd94>.

(Second service) Our Confirmands will read the charter for us.

Charter for Compassion

Emily: The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

Carol: It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

Paul: We therefore call upon all men and women

- to restore compassion to the center of morality and religion
- to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate
- to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures
- to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity
- to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

Ella: We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

Amen.

Discuss the following quote from Karen Armstrong with three or four neighbors and share what that means to you. “A compassionate city is uncomfortable when anyone is homeless or hungry. Uncomfortable if every child isn’t loved or doesn’t have opportunities to grow and thrive. Uncomfortable when any group anywhere in the world is marginalized or oppressed. Uncomfortable when, as a community, we don’t treat our neighbors as we would wish to be treated.”