

Two Peace Processions
Palm Sunday Year C / Confirmation March 28, 2010
Rev. Rebecca Kiser

When many of us were the age of our confirmands, the war our country was in was Viet Nam; the guys in our high schools had to register for the draft, and wait to see what their number was. Many were called up – a few enlisted, but Viet Name was not a popular war. Some of you all here may have been hippies or part of what was called the Peace movement. I came along towards the end of all the controversial stuff, and was part of what we called the Jesus People, with Jesus stickers on my parent's car and all over my Bible, which I carried to school daily. Seminaries and Bible Colleges had increased enrollments, as that was a way to avoid the draft. Young people liked tie-dyed shirts, raggy jeans and peace signs. There were famous photographs of those peace-nik hippies putting flowers into the barrels of the guns of National Guardsmen sent to keep peace...ie order. It was a time of polarization between what was called the Older Generation and the Younger Generation, the short-hairs vs the long hairs, with the Black Panthers and other radical groups thrown in. Like I said earlier, I came of age at the end of it all, so for most of it was pretty clueless. The draft ended in my senior year, so none of my classmates got called up.

Our young people today have a war, too, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and some of my children's peers have returned injured or maimed – and more will. Fortunately, the only generational gap seems to be more technologically oriented – and us people over 30 – and 40- and 50 – and 60 are actually trying to keep up. The main polarization seems to be between the radical right and all the rest of us, and those spokespeople for the far right are pretty in-your-face vocal. Congress has more of a Republican-Democrat split than I recall hearing about, although of course there have always been political & ideological differences. One big difference we've been hearing about this week is that where the 60's hippies were largely into Gandhi & non-violence, with a few exceptions here & there, folks angry today have websites inciting breaking windows and other acts of vandalism on individual people they oppose – a violent kind of intimidation and bullying that is across the line for adult behavior – and un-American. Working peacefully seems outside of their

vocabulary, and ruins their cause. This week there have been many calls for using the more peaceful methods of voting and political action.

Its not a new thing.....the gospel writer Luke talks a lot about peace, too. The angels at Jesus' birth proclaim Peace on Earth, and the crowds welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem in today's reading cry out "Peace" also. Jesus has been called the Prince of Peace, a title from way back in the Old Testament even. Peace has always been something people desire – although what we mean by it has always varied.

A couple of biblical scholars have pointed out that on that day we commemorate as Palm Sunday, 2 processions were going on about peace at the same time in the same city, Jerusalem, the City of Peace, the Holy City. On one side of the city, Pilate was entering the city with extra troops to "keep peace" in the city over the holy days of Passover, when the Jewish people commemorated being liberated from bondage in Egypt, and tended to get testy about being captive to Rome. Pilate came in mounted on a war horse, arrayed in gleaming armor, his troops marching in precision, their weapons very visible. The Romans kept the peace militarily, with an iron fist and fell quickly and heavily. They were strong, and their opinions prevailed. Rebellions were crushed. Much like those who sarcastically named missiles "Peacekeepers," peace was kept by force.

On the other side of Jerusalem, Jesus planned his prophetic entrance just as carefully to fulfill the words of prophets from Israel's past, and to visibly demonstrate the differences of God's kingdom to Rome's kingdom. He entered Jerusalem mounted on a donkey, people's cloaks for a saddle and strewn along the road, palm branches of religious celebration rather than spears, his followers cheering about peace from a totally other perspective. Jesus would make peace by giving himself up to suffer at the hands of the others, and for the sins of others, totally surrendering. This wasn't a picture of winning in terms of Pilate and his forces of "peace;" but it WAS God's way of winning according to God's kingdom and its values.

This morning, these young people are publically taking their stand with the kingdom of God and as disciples of Jesus, as we all have done, too. Yes, we live in the civil community and the world where one definition of peace is still kept by power and force; but we have also identified ourselves as part of those believers who follow the path of the Prince of

Peace, the path of self-giving and self-surrender to God; the path of compassion to all, especially to the poor and suffering; the path of fighting for social justice in this world as well as the path of winning the war against the power of evil in our hearts. While we live in the world, we also live in God's world, a world created and sustained by God, a world whose values include things not considered the way of winners in this physical world, a world that calmly rides in on the back of a humble donkey when all around us people are clamoring for bigger and better war horses. A world that is won by the self-giving death on a cross; a world of forgiveness and welcome; a world where the meek inherit the earth; a world where the hungry are filled and the rich sent away empty; a world where the last are first and the first are last. In other words, a world where things run counter to the status quo of "life as usual." God's world, invisible as a powerful nation as we usually see them, but among us just the same, and more powerful than any. We in this kingdom may be, on a political level, Americans or Brits or Haitians or Chinese or Afghans or Hungarians or any other name; yet we are most truly God's.

Let us bring in and welcome these young people, and be reminded of our own vows and pledges as members of God's kingdom and the church of our Lord, Jesus Christ. AMEN.