

Processions of Wisdom
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First Unitarian Congregation, Toronto
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We gather this morning on Palm Sunday, a day when our Christian siblings within our congregations and all around the world are reading this text from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 21 verses 1–11.

“When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately. 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

*5 “Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

*6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,
“Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”

11 The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The story of this procession is a strange and yet powerful story.

As Jesus enters the city on a donkey, a symbol of peace, while the people gather, waving palms, laying down cloaks, and shouting Hosanna! Save us!

It is a gathering of joy, of hope. A moment when something feels possible amidst the rule of empire.

Within days, the energy shifts, and the same crowd turns. We know from the way this wisdom story ends, the crowds who were shouting Hosanna, save us, are the same who will shout crucify.

This story raises an uncomfortably relevant question: What makes a crowd wise? And what makes it not?

There's a contemporary teacher of gathering, Priya Parker, in her book *The Art of Gathering*, who tells a simple but revealing truth: that when people come together without clear purpose or intention, the gathering doesn't become neutral—it becomes shallow.

She describes what she calls the “chill host”—the one who doesn't want to impose, doesn't want to shape the space, just lets things unfold however they will (p 71). But what happens, she says, is not freedom. It becomes drift, disconnection. The space invites the loudest voices to take over and the deeper purpose of the gathering becomes lost.

And her insight is this: for a gathering to be meaningful, it requires intention. It requires someone, or a community, to take responsibility for what is being created (p 73).

It comes back to relationship, one of accountability, in which the container is created and held for a sacred purpose.

This accountability asks us to look beyond the reality we would prefer or the story that feels good. It demands that we become aware of the full, complex reality, and often the inconvenient truths. We ask questions such as: what is actually happening here? Who is impacted? What am I not seeing? We understand that real life is rarely simple.

In our own tradition, we gather on Sundays to renew our spirits, to remember that our lives are bound together, to work towards justice and liberation, for we are not free until we are all free.

We gather to open our hearts to sources of wisdom within and beyond ourselves, to grow in our ability to tolerate discomfort, while also tending to one another with gentleness and compassion.

We recognize that when we gather together, energy builds. We focus our attention on what matters. We lift up something, or someone, worthy of our hope.

This accountability is not something we tend to alone, but in relationship. Whose voices are being heard, and whose are not? Who are the people who are on the margins in this gathering? Who might be harmed if we moved too quickly, or moved with attentive care?

For us to gather in wisdom, we must have the ability to slow things down, not to stop our momentum, but instead, to keep us connected. This is how we can check in with one another and tend to the bonds between us.

The wisdom story of Palm Sunday reminds us that the line between celebration and destruction can be thin.

We have to remember that wisdom is slow. If it is fueled by urgency, it is a sign that we need to pause and re-evaluate.

In the Hebrew scriptures, wisdom, (hokh-MAH) Chokmah, is something you live into, not something you possess.

This is not the kind of wisdom we usually think of: things like facts collected, or peer reviewed articles, or even the answers you finally arrive at after long hours of reflection.

(hokh-MAH) Chokmah is something different: it is something you live into.

The word itself is rooted in craftsmanship, the kind of wisdom you carry in your hands. It's the wisdom of builders and weavers, of people who learn by doing, by paying attention, by trying and failing and trying again. It's not abstract. It's embodied. It is the path you walk again and again.

Because wisdom, is not a thing you hold. It's a relationship you tend. Not with certainty, but attunement. Not an arrival, but a movement. It is not possession, but a practice.

And maybe that's the invitation for us, especially today. We are so often taught to look for wisdom as something we achieve - the right set of beliefs, a clear, answer, or that moment when we finally have figured it all out.

But the reality is, wisdom is something you step into, something you practice, and something that you grow with, slowly, over time.

Like a procession, we begin in one place, and little by little, we move forward. Uncertain where the road may lead. Not always getting it right. But with a commitment to listen for that still small voice that cries out in the streets, in our lives, and in one another, inviting us forward.

Wisdom in gathering includes our willingness to be transformed, to allow for change. We hold to our convictions with a sense of humility. Our Unitarian Universalist tradition reminds us that we don't hold the full picture, and so we open our hearts to learning and growth. Even when it is uncomfortable. And most especially when it is uncomfortable.

Our modern-day gatherings have taken a different shape. We don't lay our palm branches or stretch out our coats as a sign of welcome, making the road easier to travel. We gather in front of symbols of power, of empire, and places of significance. But we also gather online, where we scroll, click, and share. In all of these spaces, we organize ourselves to share ideas, share our outrage, be inspired, and to grow in our sense of hope.

And so in this world where information flows quickly, and it can be easy to be misled by misinformation and disinformation, we must be responsible members of our

communities, discerning which processions lead towards wisdom and which ones only feel as though they do?

This is the time to ask ourselves: whose voices are we following right now? What is getting our attention? What shapes our emotional climate? What influences are shaping us to believe a matter is urgent, important or true?

Alongside these questions, we have to take an honest inventory of our sources of information. Just as we believe in our theology that we draw upon multiple sources

The attention we give is a form of devotion, it is the sacred choice of where we are giving our energy, which shapes the direction of our lives.

I want to be clear here: this is not a call to disengage from the world; to withdraw our energy or our passion.

We need movements. We need shared hope. We need people who are willing to show up, to shout, to act. The crowd that gathered on Palm Sunday wasn't wrong to long for liberation. Their hope was real.

But hope without grounding can become unstable. Collective energy without discernment can easily be redirected.

When fear is dressed up as certainty it can feel incredibly compelling. It can give us the illusion of clarity, of knowing exactly who is right and who is wrong, who belongs and who does not. It can move through a crowd quickly, catching hold of our nervous systems, urging us to act before we have had the chance to truly reflect. And when that happens, we can find ourselves participating in something we don't fully understand, carried along by momentum rather than grounded in wisdom.

This is why discernment matters. This is why slowing down matters. Not to silence our passion, but to root it. Not to diminish our urgency, but to align it with our deepest values. Because when we are untethered from that grounding, we risk becoming reactive instead of responsive, certain instead of curious, divided instead of connected.

And so the question becomes not only what are we responding to, but how are we responding? Are we moving from fear or from love? From scarcity or from trust? From isolation or from relationship? These are not abstract questions. They are lived questions, ones we answer with our attention, our words, and our actions every single day.

To live into wisdom—into Chokmah—is to practice noticing these moments. To feel the pull of the crowd and gently, bravely, check in with ourselves and with one another. To ask: does this path deepen compassion? Does it expand justice? Does it honour the dignity of all? And if not, to have the courage to pause, to question, and sometimes, to choose a different way forward.

And that decision—whether conscious or not—is always shaped by what we treat as a source of wisdom.

These practices may sound familiar, simple event, and yet they are not easy to hold, especially in a crowd. Because gatherings have momentum. They carry us. They can make things feel clear, and unified, and urgent. This is part of their power and also part of their risk.

So the invitation for us this morning is not to avoid gatherings but to learn to move differently within them. To be people who can walk together while still listening deeply, still questioning, while remaining rooted in our values and our aspirations.

We need to be the people who will show up for liberation, show up with care, and who will stay accountable, stay connected, and stay open.

Because this world does not need more noise, and now more than ever, it needs wise movements. We need to be within communities who are willing to discern and plan, not just react. We need to deepen our connections and learnings. We need to amplify voices with intention.

This is the kind of wisdom that happens through practice and commitment. It is shaped through conversations. It is held and supported through relationships that hold us accountable, like the ones in this congregation. And it requires moments of pause, even in the midst of all the action.

So as we move through the world in these complicated times, let us grow in understanding of who we are following, what messages are we amplifying, and to what are we giving attention, and therefore, power?

And most of all, does this collective action, move us towards a more just and loving world?

Every procession, both ancient and modern, is an act of collective discernment. A declaration of what is believed to be worthy.

May we choose wisely. May we move with intention. And together, may we become a procession of love and wisdom.

May it be so. Blessed Be. Amen.