

Centre Congregational Church, U.C.C.  
Sunday Morning Service, 10:00am  
April 2, 2023  
The Rev Dr Scott Couper

**“Enter His Gates with Righteousness: A Procession”  
Hebrew Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**



How many of you are familiar with this tune? [Mary plays “The Bridal Chorus”]. Almost everyone, I assume most, if not all, of you are. Most of you then might sing along: "Here comes the bride, all dressed in white...". I hate to break it to you, but those are not the original words to the tune. The original lyrics are in German and were performed in an opera composed by Richard (AKA ‘Dick’) Wagner in about 1850.<sup>1</sup>

*Faithfully guided, draw near  
to where the blessing of love shall preserve you!  
Triumphant courage, the reward of love,  
joins you in faith as the happiest of couples!*

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<sup>1</sup> “The Bridal Chorus”, *Wikipedia*. Found at:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridal\\_Chorus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridal_Chorus), accessed April 2, 2023.

[How wonderful that it is Verne and Mary's 67<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this week!]

How many of you have heard this tune? [Mary plays 'Pomp and Circumstance'] How many of you know the lyrics?

*Land of hope and glory, mother of the free,  
How shall we extol thee, who are born of thee?  
Wider still and wider shall thy bounds be set;  
Go, who made the mighty, make thee mightier yet.*

This song was written by Sir Edward Elgar in about 1900 and is much about love of country and devotion to the British Empire.<sup>2</sup>

Mary and I remind you of these two tunes because they are most often played as 'processions'. What makes processions 'processions' is that they are not *the* event; rather they announce or conjure the 'in-gathering' or they are the assembly of those who will soon participate in the event. A procession is not the wedding *itself*, but rather the prelude for what is to come. A procession is not the graduation *itself*, but rather the spectacle that immediately precedes. Processions announce that something very important is about to happen and gathers people close.<sup>3</sup> So it was with our procession led by the children this morning.

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<sup>2</sup> Victoria Longdon, "What Are the Lyrics to 'Land of Hope and Glory' and What Do They Mean?", Classic FM (Digital Radio), September 2, 2020. Found at: <https://www.classicfm.com/composers/elgar/lyrics-land-of-hope-and-glory/>, accessed April 2, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> The theme for this short homily is inspired by: Cheryl Linsey, "Open the Gates", *Sermon Seeds*, United Church of Christ. Found at: <https://www.ucc.org/sermon-seeds/sermon-seeds-open-the-gates/>, accessed April 2, 2023.

In our reading this morning, the Psalmist began by proclaiming the blessing of God just as “The Bridal Chorus” did: “O give thanks to the Lord, for [God] is good; [God’s] steadfast love endures forever” (Psalm 118:1)! And the Psalmist continued in the same vein as “Pomp and Circumstance” when God’s assistance is invoked for Israel: “O Lord, we beseech you, give us success” (Psalm 118:25)! And so our children have palm fronds as props for our church’s procession, reenacting the psalm and the story of Jesus’ triumphant entry (Matthew 21:1-11).

This morning, I would like us to remember that the procession is not *the* event. The procession is the in-gathering, it is the convergence of the assembly before the event. And the event is Holy Week to come, and ultimately the resurrection of Jesus Christ that promises to us that we are now, and forever will be more perfectly, united with God. This morning’s Palm Sunday procession proclaims that something great is going to happen soon and it gathers us to be witnesses and participants. That is why we are adorning “the festal procession with branches” and bringing them forward to the altar, the table, the chancel areas (Psalm 118:27). The event to unfold will happen on Maundy Thursday at West Brattleboro and on Good Friday at Guilford, and Easter morning on our front lawn and in the sanctuary at Centre Church. If you are here this morning during the procession, you will want to stay for the event at the West Brattleboro church

(6:00pm). If you listen to the “Bridal Chorus”, you will want to witness ‘the wedding’. If you are here this morning during the procession, you will want to stay for the Good Friday event at Guilford (6:00pm). If you listen to “Pomp and Circumstance”, you want to witness the graduation. If you are here this morning for the procession, you will want to witness to Jesus entering into glory when he exits the tomb on Easter Sunday morning!

I wish to conclude with a special word about our children. They are leading our procession this morning for a reason. Our children are “opening the gates of righteousness”, so to speak, so that we “may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord” (Psalm 118:19). They are a prelude to our church’s future growth and relevance to our community and world. Our children this morning compose the procession that announces great things to come from the ‘Sacred Places’ initiative. I thank God for the parents and children of Centre Church. I can’t think of a better way to celebrate Palm Sunday than with a procession of children that proclaims ‘the event is about to happen’ and therefore ‘the best is yet to come’!

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.