

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: April 1, 2012  
Sermon Title: No Shortcuts  
Scripture: Matthew 21  
Pastor: Rev. Alida Ward

You know the classic parent line. *You think you have it so tough, kid – when I was your age, I had to walk ten miles to school in the snow and the rain, and, kid, it was uphill both ways.*

I *did* have to walk to school, but it wasn't ten miles, just a mile or two, and it didn't snow too much in Virginia. And if it rained, Mom gave me a ride. But most days I walked, and truth be told, I liked it, especially walking back home after school – it was time to be on my own and think and dream, time that was somehow quiet sacred space in between the intensity of school and the liveliness of home. About a half-mile from home, I had a choice to make – I could take the *shortcut* – go down Mrs. Kayhoe's driveway, she never minded, and through her backyard, then quickly through the backyard of the old lady whose name I can't remember but who also didn't mind – then through the gate into the very back of my backyard and I was home. That got me home quick.

And some days quick was good. But more often not, I'd go the long way. Past the Kayhoses and up the hill, past the Sedgwicks and the Sauniers, and then there I was at the top of Bruce Avenue, my street. Yes – **Bruce** Avenue – (for those of you aware of my lifelong Springteen adulation, I trust the irony is not lost on you) Especially in springtime, this was the way I wanted to go. Dogwoods lined the street, colors burst forth from every front yard, and the beauty – even at age 12 – took my breath away, And in those front yards, there were kids out playing, and as I wandered the street, someone would shout out that it was time to get everyone together for kick the can, and I'd throw my books on my front steps and go join in. All that I'd miss when I took the shortcut to my backyard. It was worth *taking the long way*, for the beauty, the people, the life.

Today is Palm Sunday. Next Sunday is Easter. And what I'm asking you to do today is *take the long way* to next Sunday. No shortcuts this week. Take the long way. Just like *my* long way – it's worth it for the beauty, the people, the heart, the life.

What am I talking about? Well, let's face it. We're here together in church today waving palms and being happy. **Next** Sunday, all of us and a whole lot more folks will be in church, with lilies and trumpets, being happy. Today is joy – next Sunday is joy. And for most church folks, we zip right from joy to joy.

But in between is something quite extraordinary, this week that we call Holy Week, the last week of Jesus' life. In between is the story that shapes our identities as Christians, a story that tells us *who this Jesus really is* – not the big-time king people thought they were welcoming on Palm Sunday, but the servant of all, willing to follow the path of love to his death. Welcomed with hosannas into Jerusalem today, Jesus began to feel the mood turn distinctly chillier by mid-week. He'd attracted the notice of the Romans, who didn't care much for rabble-rousing rabbis speaking up for the poor and the hurting. That didn't stop Jesus. He kept preaching, teaching, encouraging, healing – and by Thursday night, when he gathered with his friends for their Passover seder, he knew his life was nearing its end. I'm giving my body for you, he told his friends, giving my blood for you. And on Good Friday, he did. On a cross, on a hill outside Jerusalem, he gave his life -- for us.

Last week at Church School, a young boy said to Marcia, *The Romans must have named it Good Friday, because for Jesus it wasn't good at all.* Pretty sharp kid.

The Romans may have named it, but they didn't get the last word. Sorrow, evil, death, doesn't get the last word on Friday. That's what happens this week. *The story we live by*, the good news we proclaim, happens this week.

So take the long way through Holy Week. Journey with Jesus through this week. Don't take the shortcut. Join us in worship Thursday, Friday. And if you can't do that, if you can't be here in this place, then journey with Jesus in your own way, as you are able. Here's how. In your bulletins this morning is a day-by-day scripture guide for this week. Every day a story from this week to read and think about, every day a reminder of the road Jesus walked this week. Don't have a bible in your office? download an app, people they're free.

And why is it so important? Well, here's the simplest answer: Easter doesn't make a whole lot of **sense** if you *don't* journey through Holy Week. On Palm Sunday in Jerusalem, two thousand years ago, there was a tomb, hewn out of the hillside, standing empty. On Easter Sunday in Jerusalem, two thousand years ago less one week, that same tomb, hewn out of the hillside, was still empty.

Empty tomb one week, empty tomb the next week.

No story there.

There's only a story if you know what happened Monday through Friday. There is no Easter miracle without Good Friday. There's no story in the shortcut. The story of Love is found along the long way. Just like I took the long way home down Bruce Avenue because that's where the beauty and the life was, the long way through Holy Week is where the beauty is.

But the other reason to walk with Jesus along the long and hard way is simply because -- doesn't he always walk it with us?

As your pastors, David and I are privileged to walk with you down some pretty tough roads. You have allowed us to walk beside you through the valley of grief; you have invited us to be beside you along the rocky roads of divorce and unemployment; you have shared journeys of deepest disappointment and heartache with us. We have been with you on some long, hard ways.

But no matter what road we've walked with you, we've *never* been the first ones to show up for the journey. Christ is always already there. With each of you, with each of us, always the steadfast companion, always the arm around us, always the strength.

We kind of owe it to him to walk through this week with him.

We owe him that.

I want to close with a story about a young woman you've never heard of, that I'd never heard of until an email showed up in my inbox a couple weeks ago. It was marked potential spam, from an address I didn't recognize, and I almost deleted it. Why I opened it and read it, I'm not sure. It was written to me as a pastor in Fairfield, Connecticut, by two young women who wanted me to know that their sister, Rae, would be coming through Fairfield next weekend, Easter weekend. Rae turned 18 two days ago. And on this Palm Sunday, on this first day of Holy Week, she's setting out from Boston to run across the country, Boston to Huntington Beach, California. She's doing it barefoot. Barefoot. She's running barefoot to raise money for a little Christian charity called Soles (s-o-l-

e) for Souls (s-o-u-l), which finds shoes for kids around the world who don't have any. She figures that if they walk miles to school without shoes, she'll run without shoes. She hopes to raise \$5,000. She's raised just \$700 so far. But God bless her, today she starts her journey.

This is what she wrote on [her Facebook page](#). ***I had an epiphany of sorts about five months ago. I finally realized why I became a runner, what my purpose behind it was. I want to make my running have an impact on other people's lives, to touch other's souls*** - and she means that literally.

I don't know Rae Heim, but I know that she's chosen this holiest of weeks in *her Christian faith* to take the long way – really the long way – and through the gift of her own self and sacrifice, to offer Easter love and Easter hope to children who hurt. This week means something to her.

Let's be sure it means all it can to us.

No shortcuts.

Let's take the long way to Easter. *Amen.*

Rae Heim's fundraising page: <http://flavors.me/raeainslee>