

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho**

Worship

April 5, 2020

Palm Sunday

Announcements

Welcome again to worship with the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. When we started worshipping remotely, I dared to hope there might be a way for us to be together again this morning. Today marks the beginning of Holy Week, and these days are precious to us. We long to hear the handbells, to see the sun push through the stained glass windows, to gather over coffee and cookies when the service has ended. But the days of being apart continue. It's getting old, and from everything we hear, we have a long way to go. So we do what we can in the place that we find ourselves, trusting that God moves among us even now, that God's Holy Spirit continues to knit us together even when we're separated by houses and blocks, miles and on opposite sides of the country. It is still true that whether we are gathered or scattered, we are the Body of Christ.

As is our custom, I invite us to worship again on Maundy Thursday. We can't share the soup and bread supper, but you can certainly make that your menu if you choose. I'll send materials on Thursday and invite you to worship at your convenience. We hadn't gotten far enough in our planning to set a time for worship, but since I know some of you like the idea of worshipping at the same time as others, let me suggest 7 pm.

As with other weeks, I'm sending a PDF of the words of this service, so you can read along and join in with responsive and unison readings as well as some singing. And in case you didn't hear earlier, we will be sharing communion later in this service. I invite you to pause the recording so you can get something to use as bread and drink (whatever is available and whatever works for you).

Let us worship God together.

Call to Worship

We come to prepare for the holiest of weeks.

We will journey through praise, with joy on our lips; we will travel through betrayal and death, cradling hope deep in our hearts

Jesus leads us through this week, and we will follow, for he is the life we long for, he is the Word who sustains us.

We wave palm branches in anticipation, we lay our love before him, to cushion his walk.

Setting aside all power, glory, and might, he comes: modeling humility and obedience for all of us.

Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is the One who brings us the kingdom of God.

(Thom M. Shuman, LectionaryLiturgies.blogspot.com)

Song "All Glory, Laud and Honor"

All glory, laud and honor To Thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children Made sweet hosannas ring:
Thou art the King of Israel, Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest, The King and blessed One!

To Thee, before Thy passion, They sang their hymns of praise;
To Thee, now high exalted, Our melody we raise:
Thou didst accept their praises – Accept the praise we bring,
Who in all good delightest, Thou good and gracious King!

Call to Reconciliation

Wearied by our poor choices, worn down by our foolish words, we struggle to be faithful followers of Jesus. Yet, it is precisely in such moments that God comes, with that love which never gives up, that grace which is always offered freely to us. So, let us come with our prayers, to the gate of God's heart, so we may enter forgiveness and life anew. Let us pray together, saying,

Prayer for Forgiveness (in unison)

We are so busy thinking about ourselves, God of constant love, that we cannot begin to ponder what was in Jesus' mind. We shout for joy on a day like this, smiling as we remember waving our palms, yet quickly toss them aside as we go out into the world. We harden our faces, not in discipleship, but to turn away those who come looking for help from us.

Yet, because he was fully human like us, God of unfailing compassion, we too can be more like Jesus. So, as we begin our journey through Holy Week and beyond, may we choose humility over pride, weakness over strength, compassion over bullying, and seek to do whatever we are called to do, without any promise of reward. We pray this in the name of our Teacher, Jesus. Amen.

Silence is kept

Assurance of Pardon

God dares us to think like Jesus, knowing that if we do, we will discover the gifts we can offer, the words of hope we can share, the grace we can use to bless those around us.

**God hears our prayers, listens to our hearts, fills us with forgiveness, and walks with us in these moments and in all the ones to come. Thanks be to God for such incredible mercy!
Amen.**

(Thom M. Shuman, LectionaryLiturgies.blogspot.com)

Scripture Reading Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

"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."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Sermon

If it was today, the parade definitely would have been canceled. And depending on how far in advance the organizers made that decision, the branches either would have been left on the trees or stacked on the side of the road. I suppose the donkey still could have been called into service, but if you're

practicing social distancing of 6 feet between each person and honoring the stay at home edicts that are being broadcast from every corner, it's pretty hard to make a dramatic entrance or a provocative statement. And when even the Costcos and Walmarts of the country are counting how many people are in the store at any given moment, it's hard to imagine a city of 40,000 inhabitants swelling with an additional 200,000 pilgrims. It's an infectious catastrophe just waiting to happen. Which is tragic, because if ever we needed a parade, it's right about now. And if ever I was in the mood to shout and plead and stomp and sing my Hosanna's, it's this year. Lord, save us! Come and rescue us! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

In many ways the mob scene that gathered around Jesus had a different tone than it would today. And the city was already crowded and wound up. That wasn't all about Jesus; it was first of all about the Passover, about the faithful making their way to the holy city to celebrate God's liberation of them from Egypt and Pharaoh and all things slavery. But add to that the man who had been healing and teaching, disturbing the peace and stirring up hope, and the people flocked in and chanted until they couldn't chant any more. Maybe another time for their deliverance had come, this time from Roman oppression. They were beside themselves with hope and expectation, because here was the Messiah, now was God's deliverance, today was the dawning of everything they'd ever dreamed of. So they paraded and waved branches, they spread their cloaks on the ground to create their version of a red carpet, and they sang their hearts out. Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Lord, save us. Thank you, Jesus. You've come to rescue us at last. Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Except he clearly didn't have the same thing in mind they did. I doubt that they all caught on at the same time, but it didn't take long until they began to see the differences. A few probably got it early, when Jesus walked straight from the head of the parade route to the temple. When he got there, he started turning over tables and chairs, releasing doves and setting lambs free. I can hear a few begin to murmur about his need to focus. He was there to take on Rome; don't get sidetracked with religious practices. The next day he cursed a fig tree because it didn't have any fruit for his breakfast, and then he went back to the temple and started teaching. Clearly the man needed some new strategists to help him with both his message and his technique. Rather than building a coalition, he seemed fixated on offending. Rather than taking on their oppressors, he was preaching woes and warnings in the temple. Rather than creating a path to victory, he was paving a road not only to defeat but to very likely to death.

We tend to call them fickle, the ones who waved palm branches and heralded his arrival in Jerusalem on Sunday, and called for his crucifixion by Friday, but can you blame them? Their needs were real, their problems were pressing. He'd stirred up so many dormant hopes and then didn't show any evidence that he was going to deliver. Was he misguided? Inadequately advised? Just not up to the challenges and needs of the day and of the people? They wanted and needed to be rescued, and he seemed oblivious. They were clear what they wanted and needed him to do, and he seemed to be listening to a different drummer all together.

I get it this year in a way I never have before, because this year I share some of that desperate, deep-seated clarity that we need to be rescued. I watch the evening news in horror when I hear doctors speaking of their fears of failing to live up to their responsibility to save lives and treat people with the best resources possible, while risking their own lives and being isolated from their own families. I'm haunted by the rows of refrigerator trucks that have become morgues. I'm staggered by the unemployment numbers as people who were living paycheck to paycheck woke up one day to be told there would be no more paychecks. The miles of cars lined up waiting for a morsel of food. The fragility of masses of people who simply have no way to meet their needs, pay their rent, or care for their loved ones. Hosanna! Lord, save us! Come and rescue us.

When I pause to take a breath, to listen, to consider, to pray it becomes clear to me that we're not so different from the crowd of Jesus' day. Jesus didn't rescue the people as they hoped and cried for, but not because he was clueless or incompetent or ill advised. Jesus, intimately advised by God, simply – or not so simply – chose a different way. Rather than rush in as a super hero and rescue them from all that threatened to harm them, he chose instead to meet them in their vulnerability, to accompany them in their helplessness, to accept them in their weakness, to love them in their un-lovability, to redeem them in the midst of their sin. He invited them to follow him, to walk in his ways and to love with his love, to care and heal, serve and speak, worship and witness after his example.

It seems increasingly clear to me that I have a lot to learn from this story and Jesus' example. It's okay for me to take my heartbreak and terror to God; in fact, I think it's important that I ask God to hold these horrors and each and every one of us and carry us through these days, give us guidance and wisdom to meet the challenges confronting us. But rather than pleading with God to save us, I think it's time to ask God to change us. These are fertile days for considering how we live and what we value, how we confront obstacles and define strength, who we honor and just how very connected we are to the people we've been inclined to walk around and step over. I've heard it suggested that this time of staying at home is like one major time out, when we've been sent to our rooms to reflect on what's broken, how it got that way, and what our role is in turning things around. What better time than this week to listen to and watch Jesus in Jerusalem, considering how he met the challenges and confrontations unfolding all around him, and hold that alongside our reality to see what he is saying to us and what he might encourage us to do, how he's calling us to live.

One of the most familiar teachings of Jesus comes from his time in Jerusalem, between Palm Sunday and Good Friday. Matthew told us that Jesus said the day would come when the Son of Man indicted people because he'd been hungry and they hadn't fed him, thirsty and they'd given him no drink, a stranger but not welcomed, naked and not clothed, sick and not cared for, in prison and not visited. Listen to a contemporary interpretation of that vision from Maren Tirabassi: “Then the compassionate will answer, “O Holy One, when was it that we saw you jobless and delivered groceries, or lonely and drove by with balloons or wrote on your sidewalk? And when was it that we saw you at risk and did not cheat on the shelter-in-place though we could easily have done so without being caught, or frustrated to the point of explosion and played an online game with your kids? And when was it that we saw you sick and got the emergency responders or in quarantine-depression and phoned every single day?” And God will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you delivered and chocked, stayed at home, and forced an old mind to learn some new tech, made an emergency call or many boring ones ... for one of the most vulnerable members of my family, you did it for me.” (Gifts in Open Hands)

My friends, today is a good day to wave palm branches, to welcome Jesus, to cry Hosanna. But rather than asking him to rescue us from the nightmare we find ourselves in, let's ask him to lead us through it, show us how to respond, how to help the healing and hold the hurting, how to love with his love, speak with his truth, trust with his faith, risk with his courage, forgive with his grace, serve with his humility. That together with him and each other, we might come to the new day that awaits us.

Amen.

Prayer Requests

Prayers for people living in fear.

Prayers for the lonely.

Prayers for our world leaders making tough decisions, including the WHO and CDC. Guidance for scientists and a shield around health care workers.

Friends whose 10th grader committed suicide yesterday

Prayers of the People

Holy and beloved God, we need you. We can hardly remember a time when, as a community, a nation and a world, we've needed you more. People are sick and dying. Hospitals are overflowing, and being erected in parks while convention centers and hotels are being transformed into more beds to care for more sick. Doctors, nurses, EMTs and aids work until they drop, putting themselves at risk to care for others. People are out of work, and out of food. Children are out of school and too often, out of food. Grocery store workers, truck drivers, cleaners and on line order fillers continue to work to serve us, while putting themselves at risk. We pray for the most vulnerable and at risk, for the lonely and isolated, for those overwhelmed with anxiety and tormented by fear, for those for whom home is becoming a prison instead of a refuge. The list of needs and concerns is endless, and you know it far better than we do. We pray, merciful God, for your healing and holding, your compassion and mercy, your presence and wisdom.

Loving God, we see signs of your presence everywhere we look, for we see people who are going out of their way to share your love and live by your example, as well as those who are staying home in order to stop the spread of infection. We give thanks for those who make phone calls and deliver groceries, who sew masks and make hand sanitizer, who give away rolls of toilet paper and bowls of hot soup. We pray for your guidance and wisdom for scientists and researchers, for leaders making difficult decisions, for teachers who are searching for ways to support and encourage their students from afar. Help us all, O God, to identify what part we can play in the healing of your world, and by your loving hand, guide us to offer what we can.

Holy God, even as we ask you to accompany us through these days of COVID-19, we ask you also to help us walk with Jesus through these holy days of his time in Jerusalem, that we might watch and pray and learn what it means to love with his love, speak with his truth, trust with his faith, risk with his courage, forgive with his grace, serve with his humility. By your mercy, may we accompany him into Jerusalem and through each of the steps of toward and onto the cross, that we might also walk with him in the promised days of a resurrected new life.

Hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and hear us as we join together in the prayer Jesus taught: Our Father

Prayer of our Savior (debts)

Offering

This is that section of the service when we routinely pass a plate and receive the gifts of money you choose to give to support the church's ministry. As I hope you know, you can still mail those to 408 Cedar Street or drop them into the mail slot to the left of the door. Whatever you give will be gratefully received and used to continue the church's ministry. The offering is also a time for us to consider how we use and share other gifts we have: gifts of our time and kindness, our patience and understanding, our courage and commitments. In countless ways, each of us and all of us have something to share with God's people and Christ's Church. Thanks be to God.

Song "Come to the Table of Grace"

Come to the table of grace. Come to the table of grace.

This is Christ's table, not just yours or mine. Come to the table of grace.

Come to the table of peace...

Come to the table of love...

Communion

Words of Invitation

For Holy Communion this morning, I invite you to lend Christ your table.

On the first day of Holy Week long ago, people throughout Judea arrived at the dusty gates of Jerusalem, primed with “Hosanna” in their hearts and Jesus asked to borrow a donkey.

On the Thursday that followed, Jesus rented or was given John Mark’s mother’s Upper Room to celebrate the Passover with the disciples.

On the afternoon of the resurrection, Jesus was invited into a house in Emmaus and used the bread of that hospitality to break and bless.

Lend Christ your table, your bread, your cup and your heart, for, as the disciples told the person who loaned the donkey, “The Lord has need of it.”

Prayer of Consecration

We are one bread, one body, one cup of blessing. Though we are many throughout the earth and this church community is scattered, we are one in Christ. In your many kitchens, and living rooms, rest your hands lightly upon these elements which we set aside today to be a sacrament. Let us ask God’s blessing upon them.

Gentle Redeemer, there is no lockdown on your blessing and no quarantine on grace. Send your Spirit of life and love, power and blessing upon every table where your child shelters in place, that this Bread may be broken and gathered in love and this Cup poured out to give hope to all. Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live in you. Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you.

Words of Remembering

We remember that Paul the apostle wrote letters to congregations throughout places we now call Greece, Turkey and Macedonia, and they were the first “remote” worship resources. Our online service has a long heritage. The Communion words sent to the church at Corinth were these:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Sharing of the Elements

Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.

We are one in Christ in the bread we share.

Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

We are one in Christ in the cup we share.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Let us pray in thanksgiving for this meal of grace, rejoicing that, by the very method of our worship, we have embodied the truth that Christ’s love is not limited by buildings made with human hands, nor contained in human ceremonies, but blows as free as the Spirit in all places.

Spirit of Christ, you have blessed our tables and our lives. May the eating of this Bread give us courage to speak faith and act love, not only in church sanctuaries, but in your precious world,

and may the drinking of this Cup renew our hope even in the midst of pandemic. Wrap your hopeful presence around all whose bodies, spirits and hearts need healing, and let us become your compassion and safe refuge. Amen

(Maren Tirabassi, Gifts in Open Hands)

Song "What Wondrous Love Is This"

What wondrous love is this, O my soul! O my soul! What wondrous love is this, O my soul!

What wondrous love is this! That caused the Lord of bliss

To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul, To bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing, To God and to the Lamb, I will sing.

To God and to the Lamb Who is the great "I Am,"

While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing. While millions join the theme, I will sing.

Benediction

Whatever wilderness the Spirit has brought you to:

walk in boldness, as a beloved child of God

walk in peace, under the shelter of the Most High

walk in faith, knowing Christ walks with you. Amen.

(Joanna Harader)