

Palm Sunday

March 28

Welcome and Announcements

Prayer Requests

Prelude (Recording begins)

Psalm for the Festal Procession: Psalm 118:19-29

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord....Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar....

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for God's steadfast love endures forever.

*Hymn

"Hosanna, Loud Hosanna"

#267 Blue Hymnal

***Hosanna, loud hosanna, the little children sang;
through pillared court and temple the lovely anthem rang:
to Jesus, who had blessed them, close folded to his breast,
the children sang their praises, the simplest and the best.***

***From Olivet they followed 'mid an exultant crowd,
the victor palm branch waving and chanting clear and loud;
the Lord of earth and heaven rode on in lowly state,
nor scorned that little children should on his bidding wait.***

***Hosanna in the highest! That ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer, the Lord of heaven our King.
O may we ever praise him with heart and life and voice,
and in his blissful presence eternally rejoice.***

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we gather today to remember the exuberance of those who were there to witness Jesus' entry into the troubled city of Jerusalem and to feel the same exuberant hope for your reconciling power to bring understanding to our own messy world, especially in those places where powerful interests overwhelm our human desire to care for one another and share the world's abundance. In the holy Name of the One who makes a way for all of us we pray. Amen.

Story of the Festive Procession: Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Meditation on the Festive Procession

Let us imagine Jerusalem together, on the day when Jesus came riding in on a donkey, and people laid palm branches and items of clothing as a welcoming carpet on the road before him.

Imagine that you are there. The city is crowded with people from all walks of life. They've come from all the countryside around, even from other countries, to celebrate an eight day festival that has both national and religious importance. You are here to remember an historic event that took place over 1200 years ago; but the event is fresh in your mind, because, from the time you were a small child growing up in a Jewish household, the story was told every year at the family dinner table, about how our people were freed by God from 400 years of slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Today you have come to Jerusalem, the holy city of King David, to celebrate Passover in a place that represents the majesty of free and sovereign Israel, at the height of its power, all thanks be to God.

But 900 years and more have passed since the era of King David's reign, and those were difficult times for the people of Israel and Judah. The nation had been divided into these two states, then conquered by successive empires of the Mediterranean world. For a brief time, the people won their freedom, but lost it again; and now, they were ruled and exploited as a colony of Rome. Every year, there was talk of revolution in the land; but the Romans ruled with an iron hand, and many who talked about an uprising against the state were punished by the cruel death penalty of crucifixion. By now, thousands had been crucified along the road where everyone could see and be warned what opposition to Rome could bring. Still, harsh as they were, the Romans were clever in the way they dealt with conquered people. The religious institutions were allowed to carry out their activities and rituals, and they were not just tolerated, but they were allowed to participate in the administration of local affairs. In return for their loyalty, they received the support of the Roman governors, who gave them authority in religious affairs, as long as they didn't interfere with the political order of the Empire.

So here you are, in this cultural milieu of Jerusalem, that includes armed soldiers on the streets intent upon maintaining order, Roman citizens living privileged lives in a conquered land, the priests and religious functionaries of the Temple, and the ordinary people of Judea, some making their way because of talent or good fortune, but many impoverished and angry, and some who pray each day for the liberation of Israel under a mighty military leader, anointed to be the successor of King David and rebuild the Kingdom in the name of Israel's God.

With the benefit of hindsight, we in the modern era can say that this place was a tinderbox of discontent, and, in fact was brought to the point of explosion a few years later, with one Jewish revolt and then another, that left the Temple in Jerusalem leveled to the ground and the nation of Israel a mere memory in the hearts of a shattered people. But you don't know that yet, as you visit Jerusalem for the Passover, that year when Jesus came.

You look around as you near the city. You've chosen to enter by the great golden gates, and you are surrounded by pilgrims intermingled with all those other groups in the city today. Suddenly, you hear what sounds like a disruption. People are waving branches and throwing them into the road. Some are even taking off their clothing and laying it in the dust. They are making a pathway for the strangest sort of parade, led by a man preposterously sitting on a donkey, and they are shouting phrases that you've heard before, but you think they sound peculiar and strangely out of place right here and now: "Hosanna," they shout. And you know that means, "O save us," but the man on the donkey doesn't seem to have an army or even a war horse, much less weaponry. Sometimes the phrase is used as the greeting for a king, but it just seems ludicrous to see people greeting this ordinary looking fellow as royalty. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," his followers cry, and you wonder if they foolishly believe he can perform miracles and wonders by the power of God. Looks like maybe they've had too much wine, you think. And you're a little embarrassed for them, as they cause this disruption in the midst of all those pious pilgrims going to celebrate the Passover.

It all seems outrageous. You look around you to see how other people are reacting. Some people are turning away in disgust, some are laughing, and some are shouting insults. And then you notice, with great surprise, that there are others who are kneeling and have a reverent look of hope and joy on their faces. And in the midst of it all, disregarding the behavior of the adults, the children in the crowd seem to like the man on the donkey – well, of course they do!

Suddenly a phrase from the prophet Zechariah that you've heard many times passes through your mind, when he says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey.... On that day the Lord their God will save them," the prophet said. And it makes you wonder.

Hymn

"Ride On! Ride On in Majesty"

#215

in New Century Hymnal

***Ride on! Ride on in majesty! O Christ, with brave humility,
On lowly colt, your road pursue, as palms and cloaks are spread for you.***

***Ride on! Ride on in majesty! As crowds of people come to see
and shout hosannas, lifting high their praise for one about to die.***

***Ride on! Ride on in majesty! Ride on in humble dignity;
Behold the ones you came to save from senseless life and endless grave.***

***Ride on! Ride on in majesty! For you have set your people free
And we, remembering all your pain, now meet again to hail your reign.***

Story of Jesus' action in the Temple: Mark 11:12a, 15-19

On the following day,... they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.

Meditation on Jesus in the Temple

You've heard it said, and so have I, that when the odds are stacked against you and your mission seems impossible, you can still take one small step to support the things you believe in. And perhaps that one small step that seems like the only thing you can do and that doesn't seem to be enough will tip the scales in the direction of goodness and affect the destiny of the world. I wonder if that's what Jesus had in mind that day in the Temple of God in Jerusalem.

It seems like a small act of protest, with little immediate benefit to be gained, and so very much to lose. By doing it, Jesus did not set the Jewish people free. He did not persuade the temple authorities to speak out against Roman injustice. The Jewish nation was not restored. No apparent miracle took place. And besides all that, he sealed his fate. With that one act, he violated the rule of law in both the Temple and the State. He had committed blasphemy and treason in the eyes of the law. The penalty for these crimes was crucifixion.

For many people, the story of Palm Sunday is a great enigma. "Why did he do it?" is an appropriate question to ask. If this were a practical story or a political one, it wouldn't make sense, because it doesn't come out right. But this isn't a political story. It is a religious one, about a man with deep convictions, and feelings motivated by love. He could not be compromised by considerations of safety. Jesus believed that Rome's violence against the people God loves was a violence that hurt the heart of God. And he believed that the Temple religion that accommodated itself to the values of Roman power in order to protect its own survival had betrayed the values of Jewish faith, and was not a true religion. So Jesus gave himself up for love. It was consistent with everything he taught. In the end, he even forgave the Romans and his accusers among the Temple authorities, but he neither acted in violence nor

accepted its use on others. And in the language traditional among Christian believers, who see in him the Spirit of the sacred, if we have ever been a victim or an oppressor – either one – he died for us.

Anthem or Musical Interlude

Pastoral Prayer

Holy One, we marvel at the story of Palm Sunday. Who could have imagined the events that took place that day? But you are the God of infinite surprises, who shows us a way through the darkness that the world cannot see without the insights of your love. So it was that what many saw as the actions of a rowdy bunch in the midst of a solemn procession became an awakening that renewed the meaning of ancient words of prophecy and made way for a new understanding of how the world may be transformed by your hand.

Teach us the meaning of this story, God. Help us to see its power for our lives and for our world. May it help us to see beneath the headlines of the news in our own time, to perceive the ways your work is being done by those who carry out acts of mercy and persist in faithfulness, in whatever season.

Today, we ask your blessing upon our congregation and its ministries. We thank you for the warm fellowship of this place, for those who are with us virtually and for those, enabled by vaccines and safety precautions, who are able to gather in our sanctuary in greater numbers once again.

We lift up in prayer before you those members and friends who suffer from illness, those confined to home or communal living, and all who experience loneliness or depression. We pray that we may bring to them all the awareness of our companionship in all of life's circumstances.

We remember before you all those in the global community who suffer from homelessness and displacement. We pray for all victims of war, and for reconciliation among the nations. We pray for the recent victims of mass shootings in Colorado and in Georgia, and for all the others who came before them. We pray for growing interracial understanding and for an end to racial violence.

In the coming days of Holy Week, we pray for the strengthening of our faith. May we be inspired anew by the events that are remembered and retold among us this week, as we look forward to the great assurance of the Resurrection and the faith that love never dies.

And now we pray in the words that Jesus taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

***Hymn**

"I Am Thine, O Lord"

#408 Blue hymnal

***I am thine, O Lord – I have heard thy voice, and it told thy love to me;
but I long to rise in the arms of faith, and be closer drawn to thee.***

***Refrain: Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, to the cross where thou hast died;
draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, to thy precious, bleeding side.***

***Consecrate me now to thy service, Lord, by the power of grace divine;
let my soul look up with a steadfast hope and my will be lost in thine. R***

***O the pure delight of a single hour that before thy throne I spend,
when I kneel in prayer and with thee, my God, I commune as friend with friend. R***

***There are depths of love that I cannot know till I cross the narrow sea;
There are heights of joy that I may not reach till I rest in peace with thee. R***

Benediction

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be and abide with us now and forever. Amen.

Postlude