

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

April 5, 2020 – Palm Sunday

Welcome to Worship, Palm Sunday

Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 11:30 a.m. on Sunday April 5.

Email absolute_solutions@live.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude: Sanna, Sannanina

Welcome

Hello friends. The days at home are becoming weeks, and maybe even months. Are you like me, that you need a reason to celebrate? Well, here it is. Can you believe that this is Palm Sunday?!

Thank you for joining us for worship at St Andrew's United Church in Sudbury, Ontario. We are so happy that you joined us. We are not physically together, but spiritually we are one. Imagine the community of Christ gathered across time and space to wait here at the entrance into the cobbled streets of Jerusalem. At the very same time as Jesus, a humble peasant Jew whom people proclaimed a Saviour, was coming in one entrance, the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate was coming in, as he did every Passover, through another entrance to Jerusalem displaying their military might, symbols of Roman domination. I'll speak a bit more about this remarkable contrast later. I just want you to think how you are welcoming Jesus in your heart.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

Let's take a moment, though, to prepare ourselves for worship. First to recognize that we are on land, where you are, where I am, land that was cared for, for thousands of years, long before settlers came to this land and called it Canada. We at St. Andrew's acknowledge that land where we physically worship is on the traditional lands of the Wahnapiatae First Nation and Atikemeksheng Anishnawbek. Do you know whose traditional territory your home is on? If you do, would you give thanks with me for the First Nations and Metis people who are so interconnected with this land? If you don't know the traditional territory you are on, go to <https://native-land.ca/> They have a wonderful interactive map that will help you. We give thanks for this land, and we pray that we might all work towards true reconciliation and just sharing of the land one day.

Lighting the Christ Candle

Imagining the chaos of that first Palm Parade, welcoming Jesus, everyone is excited. Perhaps some people anxious. Maybe some people awaiting Jesus worried whether this gathering would be interrupted by Roman Soldiers. This is worship, so let us take a big, cleansing breath. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe slowly, deeply several times. Pay attention to how you are feeling as you enter this Palm worship. As you again focus on your slow, deep breaths, give thanks for your body in all its complexity. All it does for you. YOU are the greatest gift you can bring in worship. As we light the Christ Candle, let us hear Isaiah's words:

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

Welcome Creator... Welcome Jesus (**silence**)

Call to Worship

We come yearning for the pageantry.

We come to celebrate together.

Feeling distant,

We know we are together!

Singing Hosanna!

We wave our palms!

(Wave your palms in the air, or whatever you have where you are that you would use to celebrate with.)

Let's join in the parade!

Opening Prayer

God, when we feel isolated and lack a sense of certainty, we feel as though we can respond through your spirit. We are working to build new relationship, new ways of understanding how to be family together. We know we are part of the great kin-dom, that spreads both far and wide. We will wave our arms as high as possible; our palms will bring us shelter in the times of need, and be a beacon of our hope in the shining sun. Now we pray the prayer that Jesus taught...

The Prayer Jesus Taught

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kin-dom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but

deliver us from evil. For thine is the kin-dom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: VU #123 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

Hosanna, loud hosanna the happy children sang;
through pillared court and temple the joyful 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 victory palm-branch waving, and singing clear and loud;
the Lord of earth and heaven rode on in lowly state,
content that little children should on his bidding wait.

“Hosanna in the highest!” That ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer; earth let your anthems ring.
O may we ever praise him with heart and life and voice,
and in his humble presence eternally rejoice!

Bible Readings

Psalms 118 - New International Version (NIV)

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

Let Israel say:

“His love endures forever.”

Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord
through which the righteous may enter.

I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.

Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

The Lord is God,

and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise you;

you are my God, and I will exalt you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his love endures forever.

From Matthew Chapter 21 - The Message translation

When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: “Go over to the village across from you. You’ll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you’re doing, say, ‘The Master needs them!’ He will send them with you.”

This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet: Tell Zion’s daughter, “Look, your king’s on his way, poised and ready, mounted on a donkey, on a colt, foal of a pack animal.”

The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, “Hosanna to David’s son!”

“Blessed is he who comes in God’s name!” “Hosanna in highest heaven!”

As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken.

Unnerved, people were asking, “What’s going on here? Who is this?”

The parade crowd answered, “This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Response to the Scripture Readings

The Word is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path. May we be given grace to experience that Word in faith and love. My friends, listen, hear what the Spirit is to you, to us. Amen.

Message

I opened this worship talking about how it is said that likely at the very same time that Jesus was entering Jerusalem, the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, was parading into Jerusalem flanked by Rome's military might into the very opposite entrance. In their book, "The Last Week..." scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan¹ suggested that there might have been some intentionality on the part of Jesus and his friends, preparing this parade; the street drama of Jesus the "Gentle king" entering the east gate cheered on by a crowd of unremarkable peasants, while into the west gate, Pilate arrives from his beach house, all pompous with his symbols of the power and domination.

As I think about those early followers of Jesus and their day-to-day life, you know what? Right now, in isolation, we share something in common with them: they only celebrated their collective faith behind closed doors. It was an act of great bravery to gather to celebrate Jesus. Any public congregation to worship anyone but the Emperor was dangerous.

But people were ready for a Messiah to come. Some wanted Jesus to lead a glorious uprising against Rome. Others just wanted this Jesus who had inspired them with his sermons on mountains and performing miracles, well they wanted him to deliver them in whatever way. But I'm sure that few of them expected to see their saviour die. God's ways are so baffling. A Messiah arriving not just on a donkey, but also on a colt. Yes, Matthew says that he sat on "them", not just one. Sending a message indeed about God's kin-dom.

God's vision of salvation arriving in humility, a stark contrast with the dominant icon of power of that time.

So I want you imagine for a moment, that crowd shouting "Hosanna! [which] is an exclamation of praise that literally means '...help, I pray'", a phrase that we Christians commonly proclaim around now, but Jews exuberantly cry Hosanna during the Feast of Tabernacles.²

"Help me, I pray." I don't think that fear has set in yet across our country, though we watch with broken hearts as hundreds die each day from COVID-19 in Italy, Spain, U.S. I think some of us are growing

¹ *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem.* Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan. HarperCollins 2007.

² "Homiletical Perspective" by John Rollefson. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* - Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide

accustomed to the down time. It's surreal. But we are calling relatives we didn't have time for when we were busy at school, work or in retirement. Others of us are living at the edge of their tolerance. They are worried. They feel vulnerable. And with every release of new statistics too close to home their, your, stress level increases exponentially.

COVID-19 has revealed a truth that we like to ignore largely; that is, that we are ALL vulnerable to this virus. A pandemic larger than anything many of us have known in our lifetime has confined the entire world behind closed doors. At a very basic level, we share that experience with the first followers of Jesus, as we do not have the luxury of worshipping together physically. Here you and I are, behind closed doors, welcoming a peaceful king into the gates of our lives today, very in contrast to our modern-day kings and their empires.

My question, then, is this: What will you do today to honour that gentle king, after the palms are put away and the cheers fade? What will you offer from your home large or small? We are all stuck at home in quarantine. Soon this Bible story will move on, a radical shift in tone. Some in the crowd who were yelling "Hosanna", celebrating, well, some in the crowd will soon be coopted by negative influencers, joining the populist cry to crucify him. In stressful, lean, isolating times, it is tempting to pay attention to voices of fear; often fearful leaders try to offer simplistic promises to fix things when the challenges are complex ones.

Jesus in that parade into Jerusalem presented a simple message: humility, peace and love are the forces from God and they will ultimately vanquish domination systems in our world. But it isn't easy. It isn't a quick fix. It might require some sacrifice. ***So, I'm thinking one gesture at a time for me.*** How about you?

Intentionally kind actions – act on them when we feel so moved. Why delay? We are quarantined, we have lots of time. As we hear pompous politicians that remind us of arrogant Pontius Pilate showing off his military might. Do you know any modern examples of leaders like that? Here is a challenge: intentionally praying for them, and remember that they too are human. Maybe they don't look like they are vulnerable, but they are. The parade will soon be over, my friends, but let the celebration of who Jesus is, his humility and love, by actively living our lives as a reflection of our gentle king. Amen.

Holy Wisdom, speak us in a special way today. These are challenging times. Truly being thankful, not just in a “gratitude light” kind of way, but truly acknowledging our blessings around us, and connecting in a way that triggers in us generosity and a new sense of being disciples of Jesus in a movement of love and solidarity. May our welcoming Jesus give us courage to walk through Holy Week, from the cheers to Good Friday calls to crucify him. Love us, accompany us, through moments within the shadow of death to, reminding us that this too shall pass and that the nighttime of death always gives way to the dawn of your new possibility. Amen.

Offering Moment

We have talked about bringing yourself to the celebration; you, the greatest gift you can offer to God and to bless this world with. We can't pass around an offering basket in this virtual worship, but... but you can reflect on what you can give. Are you a listener? Can you call a friend who is anxious? Is there a kind gesture in you waiting to be shared, leaving a meal for neighbour in crisis? So many organizations out there needing a financial boost, especially work in the 2/3 of our world that don't have medical infrastructure to respond to the pandemic. Whatever your offering, may it be from your heart.

Offering Hymn: MV #191 What Can I Do?

What can I do? What can I bring?
What can I say? What can I sing?
I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer.
I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.

Offering Prayer

I offer this prayer from Thom M. Shuman:

As we offer our hearts and gifts, may we have the same mind as Christ, remembering those who have so little, thinking of all the ways we can serve, trusting completely in your love and grace, Loving God. We pray this in the name of our Brother, Jesus. Amen.

Prayers of the Community

Here we are, God, each of us, sitting in a favourite chair, each of us in our own home, and yet, we are connected. We are connected to one another by the cords of faith and hope and the promise of resurrection. We thank you for the gift of worship, wherever we find ourselves today.

Like the people who lined the streets to welcome a parade, we welcome Jesus into our hearts. He comes to us not down the main street, in the rush of a crowd, but he comes in the phone calls we have received from friends, in emails, and in the quiet moments when love speaks to our hearts and reminds us not to fear. Each of us can think of a moment of such intense generosity, such kindness, such grace. We thank you for these holy encounters through the week.

Like the people who lined the streets to welcome a parade, we come holding our own concerns, and wondering what lies ahead for us. In silence, we name the burdens we carry, the people we love, all the anxiety.... We offer it all into your heart.... God, hear these prayers.

We pray that you will make our vision big enough to keep seeing goodness in spite of the headlines, that you will help us to keep things in perspective, that you will give us the faith and trust we need to walk through these dark days, in a week that promises to be a long succession of Good Fridays. Hold us tight. Give us the assurance that we are known and we are loved. Help us to remember that we are not alone, that we live in the world you created in goodness. Help us not to forget this week.

We make this prayer in the name of Jesus, who is our light in darkness, our teacher, our way. We will follow where he leads, and keep our hearts open for your presence and your blessing. In his name, we make this prayer. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU #122 All Glory Laud and Honour

All glory laud and honour to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

You are the King of Israel, and David's royal son,
now in the Lord's name coming, our King and blessed one.

All glory laud and honour to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

The multitude of pilgrims with palms before you went;
our praise and prayer and anthems before you we present.

All glory laud and honour to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

To you, before your passion, they sang their hymns of praise;
to you, now high exalted, our melody we raise.

All glory laud and honour to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

Their praises you accepted; accept the prayers we bring,
great author of all goodness, O good and gracious king.

All glory laud and honour to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

Blessing

Let us leave this virtual sanctuary now, grateful for the love of God that will surely carry us through these challenging times. We are not alone, God is with us!

Let us go, witnesses to the life of Jesus who came to us as both a teacher and servant; he taught us to love deeply, to serve and to share unconditionally.

And even in this time of isolation, we are reminded, that we are connected by God's Holy Spirit, all of us important parts of the same Body in Christ.

Will you say with me as we did last week, praying as our United Church Moderator did:

Creator God: help us to reach out with our hearts when we can't touch with our hands; help us to be socially connected, when we have to be socially distant; help us to love as perfectly as we can, knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear." Amen.

Postlude

Call to Worship from "Holy Week Resources" created by Shining Waters Regional Council found at <https://shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Holy-Week-Resources-30032020.pdf>

Offering Prayer thanks to Thom M. Shuman <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>