

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 118)*

One: "This is the day that the Lord has made."
All: **"Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"**
One: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."
All: **"From the Temple of the Lord we bless you."**
One: "O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good."
All: **"God's steadfast love endures forever."**
One: "With branches in your hands, start the festival."
All: **We come to worship the Lord our God.**

***HYMN OF PRAISE** "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" [GtG 196]

1. All glory, laud, and honor
To Thee, Redeemer, King,
To Whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring!
The people of the Hebrews
With palms before Thee went;
Our praise and prayer and anthems
Before Thee we present.
2. 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.
3. Thou didst accept their praises;
Accept the prayers we bring,
Who in all good delightest,
Thou good and gracious King!

**All glory, laud, and honor
To Thee, Redeemer, King,
To Whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring!**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

O God, as we come before you singing your praises, we ask that you would help us make our lives congruent with our words. We tend to say one thing and do another. We talk of believing in you, but our actions often reveal a different truth. We claim to love you with all our heart and soul and strength and mind, but our lives tell a different story. Forgive us, gracious Lord. Renew us by the power of your Word. Transform us by the working of your Spirit. Love us, and in doing so, teach us to love you in return. For it is in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from II Corinthians 5)*

One: "The love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all."

All: "And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them."

One: We believe in Christ's death on our behalf, and the forgiveness of our sins because of his sacrifice on the cross.

All: **Therefore, we rejoice in the good news that we proclaim and in which we believe: for in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.**

***RESPONSE OF PRAISE** "We Are Forgiven" GtG 447

**We are forgiven. We are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God.
(Repeat)**

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THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Let your Word, O God, break open our hearts this day through the power of the Holy Spirit, that we may enter into the coming Holy Week with the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Amen.

A GUIDED ANTIPHONAL SCRIPTURE READING

from Matthew 21:1-11 and Matthew 27:11-37

(New Revised Standard Version)

[Is Jesus active, or passive?]

^{21:1} When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.”

^{27:11} Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You say so.” ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?” ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

[The cry of the crowds]

^{21:6} The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ 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!”

^{27:15} Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” ... ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹ The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” ²² Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” All of them said, “Let him be crucified!”

[How plants are used]

21:8 Some from the crowd cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

27:28 Then the soldiers of the governor stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

[How clothes are handled]

21:7 The disciples brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ And a very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road.

27:35 And when they had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots.

[How is Jesus identified?]

21:10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

27:37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

SERMON "From Victor to Victim" by Pastor Bill Vincent

My, how quickly things can change.

From being for Jesus to being against him.

From branches cut from the trees to place at his feet, to a reed scepter placed in his hand and a crown of thorns placed on his head.

From spreading their cloaks on the road before him, to dividing his clothes among them by casting lots.

From entering the city in glory, to exiting the city in disgrace.

From the respectful "**This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee,**" to the scornful "**This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.**"

From honoring his person, to screaming for his blood.

From "Hosanna!", to "Crucify him!"

Ah, the fickleness of the human soul/heart.

Like the fickleness of a Peter, who goes from proclaiming his loyalty to Jesus to denying he knows Jesus.

Like the fickleness of a Judas, who goes from a trusted disciple to the ultimate betrayer.

Our fickleness is mirrored in that of the crowds, the disciples, others.

We are so easily discouraged, so easily disappointed.

We so easily give up, so easily misunderstand.

We so easily change our colors and our loyalties.

We go from friends to foes.

From determined to despairing.

From loving to loathing.

From faithful to faithless.

And Jesus is caught in the middle. Caught in the middle of the celebration of the Palms and the despair of the Passion.

There is a dissonance expressed between these two poles of our existence. A tension in life.

And also a misunderstanding.

For the celebration of the Palms is not as good as it appears.

And the despair of his Passion is not as permanent as it seems.

The celebration of Palm Sunday does not last. The crowd's joy is fleeting, ephemeral. In fact, their understanding is superficial and misguided.

The despair of the Passion does not last. The disciples' sense of hopelessness is not forever. And -- the really good news -- its death is not the final answer.

Now, simply because there is a misunderstanding is not to suggest that the Palms and the Passion have lost their significance. No. The message of them both is fitting; their significance, lasting.

But appearances can be deceiving.

For to all appearances, Jesus looked like a victor on Palm Sunday.

To all appearances, Jesus looked like a victim during his Passion.

When, case in point, the opposite is closer to the truth.

On Palm Sunday, he was more a victim of the people's misunderstanding and misguided hopes. They thought of him as the triumphant king, returning to Jerusalem in glory to free them from Rome's iron hand. No wonder when he did not fight, when he remained silent before his accusers -- no wonder they were disappointed and leveled on him their anger, which was but the expression of their pain. Their high hopes were crushed -- and they did the same to Jesus.

During his Passion, Jesus was more the victor over the people's misunderstanding and misguided hopes. He refused to play their game. He refused to be bullied into fitting their categories and fulfilling their misguided hopes. He would follow God's will to the end: "Not my will, but yours be done." He prayed that way in Gethsemane; he lived that way to the cross.

So the same people that cry out "Hosanna!" also cry out "Crucify him!"

And the same one who basked in the questionable glory of "Hosanna!" lived to the bitter end the consequences of "Crucify him!"

And maybe that's the point. For even though Jesus appears in the first instance to be active, and in the second to be passive, yet still he remains constant. There's a steadfastness in his work and demeanor, in his action and even in his silence.

And so, over and against the fickleness of the crowds, of the disciples, and even our own, there stands the steadfastness of Christ; the constancy of God, even in times when it appears just the opposite. God remains true to God's word. God sticks by God's promises and by us. This is our hope. This is our saving, even from our own fickleness.

So at the end of the story, as Matthew tells it, Jesus, true victor over death, stands before the disciples and says,

"Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt.28:20)

We proclaim that presence every time we worship.

We seek to live that presence every day in our relationships, in community.

Yes, in many ways, Palm Sunday and Passion Week seem to sound a grating discord. But in reality, theirs is an ultimate harmony. A harmony of paradox. The harmony of God's embrace of the whole of life and of us.

For the body is broken that you might know healing.

The blood is shed that you might know life.

Pain endured that you might know relief.

Sorrow embraced that you might know joy.

A cross borne that you might know God.

All of it founded solidly upon the Lord who is with us in life and in death, through our faithfulness and our faithlessness -- the Lord who is with us ... always.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

In life and in death we belong to God.

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,**

**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

With believers in every time and place,

we rejoice that nothing in life or in death

can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Jesus suffered death and rose to glory for the life
of the world.

Let us lift up our hearts in thanks to God and pray
for the cares of the world, saying,
Save us, O Lord, **for your mercy is great.**

Holy God, your Son humbled himself, even to death,
to show us the power of loving service.
Guide those holding positions of power,
that their decisions give rise to the mutual flourishing
of the world you so love.
Save us, O Lord, **for your mercy is great.**

Healing God, your Son is betrayed and crucified
in our violent world each day.
Raise us to a new and rightly ordered world
through the reconciling love of Christ,
where all victims of violence, persecution,
shame, or terror may stand together with you in peace.
Save us, O Lord, **for your mercy is great.**

Forsaken God, as your Son suffered his cruel death
on the cross,
darkness covered the whole land.
Enlighten us to care for your creation,
awaken us from our denial and abuse,
and help us to alleviate its suffering.
Save us, O Lord, **for your mercy is great.**

Grieving God, your Son consoled others in life and in death.
We pray for all who are distressed, broken, or sorrowful,
that together with Christ in his suffering
we may be healed and raised in you.
Save us, O Lord, **for your mercy is great.**

Embracing God, your Son gathered the world in his arms
when he stretched them out on the cross
that the world might know that in life and in death,
we belong to you.
We pray for all those who fight this virus that attacks us all.
Grant us all courage to face our fears,
patience with one another,
protection from enemies we cannot see,

and grace to give ourselves into your hands
when we have done all in our power.
Save us, O Lord, **for your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, your Son was lovingly cared for
as he was laid to rest in a tomb.
We remember before you those who have died
and pray for those who will die today;
enfold them in your love,
that they may rest and rise with Christ forever in his light.
Save us, O Lord, **for your mercy is great.**

We ask all this in the name of Jesus,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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.**

OFFERING

Invitation

What do we have to give? Time? Organizing skill? A listening ear? For
what are we most thankful? Family? Friends? Education? Meaningful work and
activities? The gift of life and breath? All good things we possess and all the
time we enjoy on this earth are gifts from God. We are invited to a generous
offering of thanksgiving.

**Doxology GtG 606*

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures here below;
praise God above, you heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

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**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Thank you, O God, for the gift of Jesus Christ our Lord. As we
remember his ultimate gift, may we be moved to give of ourselves, that others
might come to know you and know new life in you. To that end, use us and
the gifts we offer. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***HYMN** “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” GtG 223

1. **When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.**

2. **Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.**

3. **See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?**

4. **Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Go, to carry the love of God in Christ into all relationships.
Go with the blessing of God, who expands our lives,
to see and hear and feel how valued we are.
Go in peace, assured of God's presence with you,
with the mind of Christ Jesus as your path and guide,
and the constant companionship of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

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