



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
Palm Sunday April 5, 2020

Gathering Around God’s Word

If you are worshipping with another family member or with children, you are invited to have different voices share and read the various parts of the service. Today is Palm Sunday and it is difficult to not be together. See if you can find a branch from your yard or find a scarf or other piece of fabric to wave as we sing our first hymn together. We can sing our Hosannas and wave our “palm” branches from all the various places we are worshipping from this morning.

*Begin your worship this morning by watching the YouTube Video @ <https://wpceugene.org/palm-sunday-2020-video/>
Or you can go to the Church’s YouTube Channel:
Westminster Presbyterian Church Eugene*

Call to Worship

**Awake to the day of triumph for our Savior!
Give thanks for this day that leads to the
cross.**

Come with your branches, hosannas, and songs!

Fill the air with welcome to the Lord!

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

Opening Hymn *Hosanna, Loud Hosanna* #197

Call to Confession

Let us face this day of palms and Jesus' passion with honesty, confessing our sin before God.

Prayer of Confession

Holy God, sure of your faithfulness even in your dying, comforted by your compassion toward your people in every age, we come to you this day with our sin and doubts heavy on our hearts. We have withheld from your people and from your creation, the care and tending they deserve. We have given into our despair and lost our hope. We have rejected the cornerstone you sent. We have doubted your presence and truth. Forgive our failings, heal what we have broken and nurture what we have neglected. Lead us to your wisdom so we may know your peace. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Our God has come to us humble, in the form of a slave, to free us from the weight of sin and death. Jesus' obedient suffering has released you. Your sins are forgiven, in the name of the one who is exalted beyond what we can comprehend: Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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.

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 118:1-2; 19-29

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast
love endures forever!

²Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter
through them and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter
through it. ²¹I thank you that you have answered me and
have become my salvation. ²²The stone that the builders
rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

²³This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice
and be glad in it. ²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O
Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the
festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the
altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are
my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his
steadfast love endures forever.

New Testament Reading: Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying 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. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' ⁴This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵ '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.'

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

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

Reflection

The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

This is not the sermon I wanted to write, nor is this the sermon anyone wanted to hear. Because at one point over the course of the last few weeks we all so strongly hoped that we would be back together in the sanctuary especially on this day where we remember and celebrate

Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. But instead, we are all still apart at least in physical space. However, I would argue that we are definitely still together in spirit—maybe even more so than usual. And, I know we are definitely together in Christ.

However, there are realities staring us in the face that remind us this is not how the world is to be. Classrooms, restaurants, concert halls, sanctuaries, dance studios, sports fields, are not supposed to be empty. Hospitals are not to be over capacity and struggling to help anyone who walks in their doors. Nursing home and care facility doors are not to be locked down. Graduations, sports events, concerts, church, school, weddings, memorial services, vacations are not to be cancelled. Playgrounds are not to look like crime scenes roped off with yellow caution tape. People are not meant to be isolated, alone, scared and worried. These are the moments when we usually turn to friends, neighbors, family, church, and community to come together to support one another. But right now we can't—or can we?

History is filled with times of disaster, pandemic, war and terror and from those times come stories of people realizing that we can always do more together than apart. And that is true even today. Even with stay at home orders or social distancing practices, we are coming together. We may at times feel alone, but we are all doing this together to make a difference. We are doing all of this for the least of these and for each other, for our world. We are doing all of this to care for all God's beloved children.

Today, Palm Sunday, is the beginning of our journey through the pain of Holy Week and ultimately to the joyful discovery of the empty tomb of Easter. Palm Sunday has always been one of my favorite Sundays in the church year. I have such fond memories of being a child at Pines Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas and our palm processional that would start at one end of the

church, head outside and then finish in the sanctuary. It was a celebration indeed, full of palm branches, singing, and the worship of God. As a mother, I have cherished watching my children be nurtured in faith traditions of the church such as this. Here at Westminster, I so look forward each year to our Palm Processional with our youth and children. To say I am missing that today would be an understatement. Hopefully you had a chance to watch the video of our WPC children and youth exclaiming their Hosannas from all over town. It is definitely not the same, but seeing them and hearing their voices is good for the soul.

It is a common misconception, especially for those outside the church, that Hosanna is an exclamation of joy like “hooray!” As in “Hooray, Hooray! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” And although there was definitely a celebration in the air that first Palm Sunday, the word Hosanna is Aramaic and is actually translated “save us” or “help us.” “Save us, Help us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Perhaps this year, the full meaning of the word Hosanna will resonate in all of our lives in different and new ways. I don't know about you, but yelling *Help us* to Jesus sounds like a pretty good response to the current situation in our community, nation and world. And perhaps, for today, it is the only prayer we really need to utter.

When we are overwhelmed by the headlines or mourning the loss of our day to day life, *help us, O God*. When we are concerned for the health of our loved ones or for all our health care workers, *help us, O God*. When we are separated from our loved ones or our livelihood, our jobs, or our hobbies, *help us, O God*. When we fear for our health or a loved one's health, *help us, O God*.

The most meaningful Palm Sunday worship services, to me, have been those that have begun with the

celebration of the palms and ended with the somber note of the passion. It is a service that begins with all the pomp and circumstance of a parade and often ends in silence or with the mournful tolling of a bell. After all, today begins our journey into the holiest of all weeks. It is the week where Jesus will gather in the upper room with his disciples, sharing with them the Last Supper and commanding them to love one another as he has loved them. It is the week where Jesus will pray in the garden. It is the week where he will be betrayed by those who were supposed to love him the most. It is the week will move to the darkness of Good Friday, the day where we remember the arrest, suffering and crucifixion of Christ. The light will be extinguished and darkness will appear to take over the world. *Hosanna! Help us, O God.*

As I read in one commentary this week, Palm Sunday is the day where celebration and praise converge with loss and grief. This has always been true, but this year even more so as we are all living into this betwixt and between state of the COVID-19 Pandemic and all its many impacts on the economy, on healthcare, on education, on everyday “normal” life—the list really does go on and on.

Right now, it is easier for us to err on the side of loss and grief, but as Christians we believe that God does not want us to give in to despair. We can approach this Holy Week knowing that the promises of Easter are both here with us today and not quite yet fulfilled. The glory of Easter is something we both proclaim and hope for continually throughout our lives.

This week is not going to be easy. There is a lot to mourn and grieve. There is much that contributes to our fear and insecurities. But that is ok—whatever your feelings or thoughts this week, let them be. They are yours and they are where you are. And wherever that is, it is normal. This is a week where we usually gather as a worshipping community to share and remember

together and it is a real loss that we cannot do that this year. We will still gather together—it just won't be in the same way that we are used to.

Hopefully you found the PDF for Holy Week that I put together for our journey to the cross and ultimately to the empty grave. It is a tool we can all use to stay connected to God and to each other this week. It is posted on our website and Facebook and we have sent it via email and regular mail for some. If you did not see it please let us know. Each day there is a Bible reading, something to “do” or reflect on, and a prayer. I encourage you to set aside time each day this week to spend time with God and with each other. If you are home with someone, I encourage you to work through it together. If you are alone, think about calling or video calling a loved one or friend. If you know someone from our church community who is alone, think about reaching out to them. I will also be checking in with you all via video on the church YouTube Channel and hope you join me.

This is a new time for us all, but we can find comfort in knowing that God is with us through it all. God constantly reminds us through the life, death and resurrection of Christ that crying, pain, sorrow, doubt and fear are all temporary moments of affliction in our earthly life. They compare not to the promises of everlasting life that have been given to us.

We will gather together in person again. Although we do not know the time, we know it will happen. And in the meantime, we can rest assured that God is there with us every step of the way. As you enter into Holy Week, remember Christ, the king of the world, riding humbly on a donkey to pave the way for all of us to join him in the eternal kingdom. And as we walk through the shadows of this life, that same Christ is there walking along with us, reminding us that nothing, NOTHING, can ever separate us from God's love. *Hosanna, save us Lord! Amen.*

Responding to God's Word

Affirmation of Faith

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Reflection Together

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Take a moment to think about your “Hosanna” for today. In other words, finish these sentences: Help us Lord... or Save us God from...

If Jesus were riding down your street right now, how would you greet him? What would your prayer of help be? You can think about a prayer for yourself, for your family and for our community/world. If you are worshipping with someone else, take a moment and share these things together before joining in the prayer below. During the moment of silence, lift these prayers before God.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Jesus comes to us humbly, riding a donkey and proclaiming a message of peace. Especially during this time when peace may be hard to find, let us join our hearts and minds together as we lift prayers for each other, for our church and for our world...

We pray for your church. For the men, women and children who long to gather together today, but cannot. When we think of all the empty houses of worship, O God, we are filled with deep sadness and pain. Help us to remember that you do not dwell in a building, but dwell with us wherever we are.

God of mercy, hear our prayers.

We pray for leaders all over the world as they are called to make difficult decisions day in and day out. Guide them, O God, as they are faced with insurmountable challenges.

God of mercy, hear our prayers.

We come to you this day with heavy hearts for all the pain and suffering and fear that we read about in the news and that we see in our own lives. We pray for our children as they grapple with understanding things even adults cannot. We pray for teachers and business owners for all those whose jobs have been eliminated or suspended.

God of mercy, hear our prayers.

We pray for health care workers, for all those who work within the walls of hospitals and clinics, for first responders and care givers of every kind. We pray for those who live and work in nursing homes or other retirement communities and for their families who are unable to be with them. *God of mercy, hear our prayers.*

We pray for all those whose plans and dreams have been changed in very abrupt, unsettling ways. For students, (especially seniors), for athletes, for those with plans for weddings, funerals, graduations, reunions. Comforting God, we pray for those who are isolated and alone, cut off from family at a time where they need them the most. *God of mercy, hear our prayers.*

We especially pray for those all over your world who are sick, for those who are overcome with anxiety, grief and worry. May they feel your presence and love. We lift our prayers for those we know and do not know who are suffering today whether in body, mind or spirit. Grant them the peace that only you can provide. We remember those prayers on our hearts this day... (*allow a moment for silent prayer and to share your reflections from above*)
God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Oh God, as we enter into this Holiest of all weeks, help us to remember the promises of Christ. Help us to remember to love one another as he has loved us, to pray to you at all times, and to look for those places of light that are shining within the darkness.

We pray all this in Christ’s name who taught us to pray:

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.

Sending of God’s Word

Closing Hymn: *Ah, Holy Jesus* #218

Charge and Benediction

As we enter into this week leading to the cross and ultimately the empty grave, may you feel God's presence before you to lead, behind you to nudge and beside you to comfort. Peace be with you. Amen.