



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
March 28, 2021
Palm Sunday

Leading in Worship Today:
Ursula Damgaard, Director of Music
The Rev. Marta Z. Ukropina
Liturgist: Bryan Wickman
Vocalists: Steve and Jeanie Halberg

Gathering Around God’s Word

Call to Worship

From Matthew 21:8-11

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 Jesus and those that followed Jesus 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 Jesus 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.”

Let us worship God!

Opening Hymn

Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

#197

Call to Confession

The Lord sees our hearts and knows our innermost thoughts. We can deny our wrongs to ourselves but we cannot hide them from God. As we confess our sins, let us do so knowing we say nothing that is already known to God, who is not fooled by our strength, but loves us in our weakness.

Prayer of Confession

Eternal God, in Jesus Christ you entered Jerusalem to die for our sins. We confess that we have not hailed you as king, or gone before you in the world with praise. For faint beliefs that fade in times of trouble, and for hopes we parade but do not pursue, have mercy upon us. Forgive us, O God, and give us such trust in your power that we may live trusting you and proclaiming your steadfast love; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

from John 13:31

Now the Lord Jesus Christ has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. Now the promise is fulfilled, and love's redeeming work is done: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

The Word

Prayer for Illumination

Eternal God, whose word silences the shouts of the mighty: Quiet within us every voice but your own. Speak to us through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ that by the power of your Holy Spirit

we may receive grace to show Christ's love in lives given to your service. 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!

Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

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. We bless you from the house of the Lord.

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

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

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

New Testament Reading: 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.

Anthem *Come, Ye Children, Praise the Savior*

Sermon *The Day Jesus Shows Up*
The Rev. Marta Z. Ukropina

One of my favorite church jokes that you may have heard me tell before is about Palm Sunday: A little boy was sick on Palm Sunday so he stayed home from church with his mother. When the rest of the family returned from church they were carrying palm branches. The little boy was curious and said, "why do you have palm branches?" His older sister replied, "well, you see when Jesus came into town everyone waved palm branches to honor him, so we got palm branches at church today." The little boy replied, "Aw shucks! The one Sunday I miss church is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!"

The Sunday that Jesus shows up. For the people of Jerusalem, the day Jesus showed up marked a momentous occasion and a turning point in Jesus' ministry. This is the day that many had been waiting for

—a day to see this Jesus that they had heard so much about. It is a celebration that has Jesus triumphantly riding on a donkey amidst strewn garments, palm branches and loud *Hosannas*. You can almost sense the excitement that permeates the air and hear the cries filled with anticipation and great joy.

It may bring to mind attending a parade as most of us have been to a parade at some point in our lives. With expectation, you line the streets waiting to hear the first note of the marching band, or catch a glimpse of a highly adorned float off in the distance. As a child, I remember going to a parade and waiting and waiting and waiting. I knew something good was coming as I watched more and more people line the streets, but it was hard to be patient when the only place to sit was a hard curb which was usually overcrowded.

But then it happened. You heard the marching band off in the distance; you saw a float turn the corner, the crowd started to cheer. Impatience melted away into great excitement and joy.

I imagine this is similar to what happened that day in Jerusalem when Jesus made his triumphant entry. Entries such as this were not a foreign concept to the people of the 1st century, but entrance processions traditionally belonged to kings and conquering generals; not to a Jewish carpenter from Bethlehem. Welcoming ceremonies such as this followed a characteristic pattern. The king or conqueror was escorted into the city by an army or other official group and were accompanied by cheers, songs and acclamations. The Roman Empire was no stranger to triumphant welcomes: they did it up big to show and celebrate the authority and strength of the ruler. After the entrance, there was some kind of sacrifice in the temple; usually an animal sacrifice to praise the gods.

1st century Greek historian, Plutarch, wrote of the famous Roman General Antony's triumphant entry into Ephesus. In seminary, David and I went on a trip to Turkey which traced Paul's journey through Turkey and

we had the opportunity to visit Ephesus in the off season. What a remarkable place--even in ruins! Picture for a moment the finest marble. Now imagine walking on that marble street, polished and shiny adorned with detailed columns that towered triumphantly over your head. In front of you is the immaculate library whose sculptures rival those in any museum and whose architecture is breathtaking. We visited on a rainy day, but we were all in awe of the majesty of the place. Keeping this in mind, now listen to Plutarch's description of Antony's procession:

When Antony made his entrance into Ephesus, women and men and boys [honoring all the gods], led the way before him, and the city was full of ivy and [flowers] and harps and pipes and flutes, the people hailing him as the Roman God, Dionysus, Giver of Joy and Beneficent, for he was such undoubtedly to some.

It was quite the festivity. Music, flowers, escorts--a true parade. Many of these generals and rulers would have been riding on the strongest horse, towering over all who were in their path. It was a very clear nonverbal message.

Now let's go back to Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. It is very similar. Jesus is escorted by people who spread their cloaks on the road and wave their palm branches. They chant and sing their loud Hosannas maybe even playing their harps and tambourines. Some of course were believers, some may have heard of him, and others may have been caught up in the excitement of a celebrity in their midst. Cheering him on was the thing to do. Like the processions of the time, Jesus, too, rides in an animal's back, he is hailed as a king, and he is recognized for all his deeds of power. And Jesus enters the temple. But this is where the similarities end for this parade.

There had never been a processional like this one. The first few verses show Jesus' attention and planning.

He knew what he was doing—he gave his disciples detailed instructions. Jesus was not riding on a magnificent horse, but instead was on the back of a borrowed donkey. The triumphant king was entering into Jerusalem on a humble animal. That act alone was turning imperial notions of power on their heads. But of course, Jesus was no ordinary king. He was the king of fishermen, carpenters, the dreaded tax collector, sinners, Samaritans, harlots, blind men, demoniacs, women, children and cripples. He was the king of alcoholics, addicts, the mentally ill, the homeless, the sick, the suffering, the poor, the unwanted. Jesus was the king of the oppressed, the suffering and the exhausted. He was the king for ALL.

In Matthew's account of this story, we read that the whole city was in turmoil. Of course it was. The leaders' of the city must have seen Jesus' entrance to the city as a mockery of the entry they reserved for generals and decorated Roman leaders. And then Jesus goes into the temple and instead of making a sacrifice, he turns the temple upside down as we talked about a few weeks ago. Jesus was hailed as king, but he was not playing by the rules.

Many people greeted Jesus as a king that day, but as people living on this side of the resurrection, we know that one day they were shouting their loud Hosannas or *save us now, save us now, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord* and the next day they were shouting *crucify him, crucify him!* Jesus shows up and there is a triumphant entry, but Jesus shows up and there is also an entry into the week to come--the week of suffering, death and **ultimately** resurrection. Jesus shows up and the people yell, *save us now!* Jesus responds, but probably not in the way the people expected or even wanted. He responds with what we know happens next and what we will be remembering throughout this week.

This is our second Palm Sunday where we are apart and we may be feeling frustrated, saddened or even

defeated by this. Maybe our *Hosannas* are a little more genuine this year as we continue through this long pandemic and time of separation: *Save us Lord, save us!* Perhaps that is why it is important for us to remember that today is also called Passion Sunday—a day beginning with celebration and ending on a somber note as we turn our attention to the cross. It's a day that begins with the waving of palms and the shouting of hosannas and ends with cries for suffering and death by crucifixion. We begin to hear the voices shout “crucify, crucify.” Maybe we even hear that voice within ourselves as we give into despair and we feel like the darkness is closing in. We lose the hope that Jesus is with us.

Palm Sunday is a day where we sit with both of those: with celebration and contemplation; with triumph and suffering; with forgiveness and sin; with light and darkness. We are marking our entrance into Holy Week.

Many Christians will move right from the celebration of Palm Sunday to the celebration of Easter.

One week they will shout their *Hosannas* and the next week they will shout their *Alleluias*! They will pass over the suffering and contemplation that happens between these two celebrations. And I think they miss something. For we know that Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem was marked with humility on a path strewn with mismatched, torn garments that would ultimately lead him to the cross. Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday are one in the same. We can't rewrite the story. We can't skip over the parts we don't like. We can't change the actions and behavior of Jesus' followers so many years ago.

Because, the truth is, we are just like them. We are a broken people who each bring with us our own transgressions and pain. One minute we thank Jesus for being in our lives; the next we ignore his cries for us to follow him. One minute we rejoice in our identity as children of God; the next minute we are cruel to someone else and make them feel insignificant. One minute we volunteer our time to help those in need; the next we ignore the cries of the needy. One minute we are filled

with hope and the next minute we are filled with despair. One minute we share the Good News of Christ with all those we meet; the next we are embarrassed to be associated with "the Christians."

We must resist the temptation to skip right from Palm Sunday to Easter. Yes, again this year will be different as we will not gather in the sanctuary together. But we still have a Maundy Thursday and a Good Friday service. In fact, no one has an excuse to miss them because they are available for all to worship at home at your convenience. You do not have to go anywhere or be available at a certain time. You can even show up to worship in your pajamas if you wish—no one will know! The journey through Holy Week is a gift to pause and remember and everyone is invited to take part.

Jesus gathered in the Upper Room with his disciples and shared a simple meal and we too can gather together as a community of faith to share in the one cup and one bread. Jesus was sentenced to death and was beaten and died for our sins entering into the depths of human pain.

Upon that cross he took on all our sin, suffering, and pain so that it does not have a hold on us any more. And we can gather to remember the day the light was taken out of the world by gathering in worship in a service of Tenebrae. And then we can come together in all our different homes, on couches, in living rooms, around the table, *anywhere* on Easter morning full of awe and wonder as we celebrate the resurrection. Jesus shows up wherever we are! And God is especially there this year as we cannot yet gather together in person.

The little boy in the joke was worried he missed the only Sunday that Jesus showed up. Well, the good news that we have to remember is that Jesus *will show up* and that he *does show up* each and every day. We must remember to invite him to share our journey—both the moments fraught with suffering and the entrances laced with triumph.

Jesus is here and Jesus is king. 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.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Our Savior comes to us humbly, riding a donkey and proclaiming a message of peace. Let us pray for the church, for Earth and its creatures, and for all people in need, saying, God of mercy, hear our prayer.

That Christians hear and share the word of God as true disciples,
God of mercy, hear our prayer.

That all ends of the earth receive the words of the king of peace. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

That all leaders, of church and of state, prefer humble service to empty power.
God of mercy, hear our prayer.

That all people live with gratitude for the gifts of nourishment, friendship, family, trust, patience and hope with the courage and wisdom to change whatever fails to be life-giving. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

That those who see the cross starkly revealed in their lives draw strength from the name that is above every other name. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

That we might live with gratitude for our ancestors whose faith and witness have nourished our own, that all who mourn and suffer today will be comforted, and that we, who hope to greet Jesus when he comes again, will be ready and filled with joy. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

God our creator, you show your sons and daughters the way to freedom through the life, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ in whose name we pray as we pray together the prayer he 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.

Closing Hymn: *Ride On! Ride On in Majesty* #198

Benediction

As you journey to the cross this week, go in peace, assured of God's presence with you.
Amen.