

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, April 5, 2020 – Palm Sunday

207 South Brodie St. Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Words of Welcome

May you know the Holy Spirit present with you in this time of worship God.

Call to Worship

Our Lord entered the gates of the Holy City.
Crowds shouted his praise and waved palm branches.
But within the bounds of the city there were those who feared him.
Even today, there are those who let fear claim their lives.
Lord, enter our lives this day with your healing presence.
Be with us as we walk with you toward the cross.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4559/worship-connection-april-5-2020-option-2>

Hymn

Hosanna, loud hosanna

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1. Hosanna, loud hosanna, the little children sang;
through pillared court and temple the joyful anthem rang.
To Jesus, who had held them close folded to his breast,
the children sang their praises, the simplest and the best.
2. From Olivet they followed amid the shouting crowd,
the victor palm branch waving and chanting clear and loud;
Messiah, God's anointed, rode there in humble state,
"Hosanna, in the highest!" rang out their praises great.
3. "Hosanna in the highest! That ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer, the Lord of heaven our King.
Oh may we ever praise him with heart and life and voice,
and in God's joyful presence eternally rejoice.

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Opening Prayer

God of love and majesty, we come this morning as a crowd came together in Jerusalem long ago – welcoming the One we dare to call Sovereign and celebrating the arrival of the One we know as Bearer of Hope. We offer bold words of praise and make solemn commitments to follow.

Forgive us, we pray, for letting our faithfulness disperse as the welcome wears thin, as the way get difficult, as the week goes on.

Our demand that Jesus meet our own expectations often leads us to pay little attention when the true Christ is revealed to us. Forgive us.

Our selfish goals or narrow hopes prompt us to balk at Jesus' call to lose ourselves gladly in the service of others. Forgive us.

Our flawed understanding of power's true source causes us to withhold commitment and to mistrust Jesus' utter reliance upon you. Forgive us.

Speak to us anew. Refresh our spirits on this day of palms. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

© Glen E. Rainsley. Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P66-67.

Assurance of Pardon

The One who gave courage to Jesus long ago promises to accompany us on the entire lifelong journey of faith. Upon straightaways, at crossroads, through difficult turns, our loving God remains steadfast and true. Glory be to God.

© Glen E. Rainsley. Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P103.

Prayer for Illumination

Eternal God, awaken in us a desire to hear your word, so that our eyes and ears will be opened, and the Holy Spirit given opportunity to speak to our hearts of your love and grace. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 118

¹O 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.

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.”

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The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Crowds. The first thing I noticed in the reading today was that there was a crowd. I notice crowds in the shows, movies, videos, and advertising I am watching. Crowds up until a few weeks ago were common. I think of the number of concerts, plays, sporting events, and conferences that have been cancelled all because it would mean crowds of people. Just a few months ago, it would have taken a really large crowd to catch our attention, like when the Raptors won the NBA championship, or the climate change rally happened last fall with more than 15,000 people filling the streets of downtown Toronto. Now more than a handful of people gathered gives us pause and then we assess if they are at least two meters apart.

There is nothing I can say about what we are experiencing in this moment that hasn't been said by someone on TV or social media. For us these are unprecedented times and each day seems to be a new normal with something else to pay attention to. We can easily be overwhelmed by information overload, even leading to depression for some. when we continuously allow our hearts

and minds to be taking in the statistics, news, and daily addresses of politicians, health officials and others.

The only thing we are assured of is that this too shall pass. But guaranteed the world will not be the same again, and though there will be fallout and negative effects, there is also the hope that we will be mindful of the good that has come from this experience. If nothing else creation is being given a chance to heal.

In the midst of all this, with church buildings closed, and days of the week becoming hard to track, we come to Palm Sunday marking the start of Holy Week. Without the fanfare and waving of palm branches that have for centuries awakened us to the fact that this week is something special and different for Christians, the significance of this week could go unnoticed. So, may this moment together be an opportunity to stir in us something that causes us to pay attention. It may be that the way we experience this Holy Week will be a lot closer to how the people who spent time with Jesus experienced his last days; first in jubilation with the crowds, to many questions, confrontations and discussions, to a quiet dinner with friends who had become like family, to fear as Jesus is arrested, goes to trial, and is crucified, then to the even greater fear of the unknown as those closest to Jesus sequestered themselves in a house, not knowing what was next.

Palm Sunday starts off with joy, hope, expectation, even if the expectations were off. The people wanted a strong leader like King David who would take Jerusalem, the city of David, by strength. A leader who would make Israel great again. It was not until after the threat was diminished, when Jesus made himself visible to the disciples and others in the resurrection, that they began to understand everything that had gone on before. It took a new vision and understanding for the disciples and followers of Jesus to begin to reframe their experience.

We can see how that reframing occurred if we remember that the gospels were written accounts after the fact. They were not day by day dairies or minute by minute newscasts. They were written as the writers pieced together what had happened and had the advantage of reflection. When there is time for reflection, understanding and wisdom also take hold. It was upon reflection that all the words Jesus had said, all they had experienced with him, could bring new meaning and direction to their lives and the lives of generations of Christians, including us.

I encourage you to read the next chapters of the gospel of Matthew this week. Jesus packed a whole lot of teaching into those days between his entry into Jerusalem and the last meal he had with those dearest to him. He knew his time was short. He did not sugar coat anything. He knew what was important, and that people were important. He taught about the kingdom of God, which was not earthly and yet present. He taught about justice, kindness, truth, compassion, and love. He cried, he got angry, he was scared, he was courageous, and even knowing what he would face he was compassionate, forgiving, and loving.

Jesus knew that he was not alone in this. He understood his calling; he trusted that God was with him. No matter what he faced in that week, even to the point of death, he trusted God.

We are facing many uncertainties right now. People are separated from family even when they live in the same community. And though Covid -19 has not yet hit our community in Thunder Bay as it has elsewhere, we know that the world is experiencing things we would not have anticipated. Children are at home from school, some of them facing the abuse of those who are supposed to love them, not getting the reprieve that school afforded them. Domestic and substance abuse rates

are expected to go up just from the stress of being in close quarters and the uncertainties for the future. Homeless populations are more at risk than ever as they survive by being in groups. People are stranded in countries far from home. Loved ones are dying without someone by their side, and the grief that has always been comforted by the physical presence of others is unavailable.

It is hard to trust God with all this. It may even seem like God has turned God's back on the world. This is not so. Because of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension, God knows and understand completely our circumstances. God loved and loves us so much he gave his Son that we might know that love and God's eternal kingdom, not at some future time, but right now, in the midst of turmoil, grief, celebration, joy, heartache and pain, laughter and singing.

Whatever is going on for you trust that God is present, you are not alone, you are loved, and maybe in time you too will be able to write or tell your own story of how God's love changed everything. It may be for us as it was for the gospel writers, that upon reflection all the words Jesus had said and what we have read, all we have experienced in this time, can bring new meaning and direction to our lives and the lives of generations of Christians.

May God's peace be with you. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Creator of the universe, you made the world in beauty and wonder, yet we see so much hurt and betrayal that harm the world and its peoples. We trust that your love has power in all situations, even the most troubling or tragic. So hear us as we bring to you our concerns for the people and places on our hearts this day:

We pray for people who struggle with poverty, sickness, or grief, remembering those circumstances have increased exponentially in the last months and will continue for some time. Touch people in their pain and restore their hope and health.

We pray for people and communities burdened by the weight of war, greed, hostility or jealousy. Lift their burdens and restore their hope and peace.

We pray for people who challenge regimes marked by tyranny, domination, and brutality. Liberate their lives and restore their hope and freedom.

We pray for people who are persecuted for their race or creed, or for the truth they tell; and for those who are not treated with respect or decency. Rescue them from discrimination and restore their hope and dignity.

Hear us as we pray to you in silence for those situations close to our hearts this day. Bring your grace to restore hope and healing where they are needed.

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April 5, 2020 Year A

Now we pray as Jesus taught us...

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 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, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Invitation to an offering

The amazing gift of Jesus, who fully embodied God's love, prompts us to make a grateful response. Christ's love flowed like a fountain for those he met: not only people like him, but women, tax collectors, lepers, foreigners and strangers.

As Christ followers, we have an opportunity to share this love as we support this congregation and the larger life of the Christian Church. If you feel like you would like to make a donation to St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Thunder Bay please visit our webpage at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information.

Adapted from <https://centerforfaithandgiving.org/2020/03/april-5-2020-passion-palm-sunday>

Hymn

All glory, laud and honour

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

Thou art the King of Israel,
thou David's royal son,
who in the Lord's name comest,
the King and blessed one.

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

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

2. All glory, laud and honour
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 resent.

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

You didst accept their praises;
accept the prayers we bring,
who in all good delightest,
thou good and gracious King.

Words: public domain

Benediction

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of God's Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

remain with you always. Amen.

—based on Philippians 4:7, NRSV

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