

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
Palms/Passion Sunday - April 10rd, 2022

Call to Worship – Luke 19:28-40

²⁸After he had said this, [Jesus] went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

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***Hymn**

Hosanna

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1. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Lord, we lift up your name
with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord my God!
Hosanna in the highest!
2. Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Lord, we lift up your name
with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord my God!
Glory to the King of kings!

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy God,
Source, Saviour and Spirit of all life,
Holy Three and Holy One,
In you, we confront the mystery of mercy and the courage of compassion.
As we face the Cross on which Christ gave himself,
we confront your willingness to die for us so that we might find new life.
As the Spirit speaks to us through the story of your amazing love,
spilled out in the blood of Christ,
our hearts are moved to praise you.
Words cannot express our awe,
the grief and the gratitude stirring within us,
for all you have given us,
and for all you will give us through such unspeakable love.
We fall silent in wonder and praise, Holy God.

Merciful God,
Filled with wonder and praise,
we acknowledge to you how often we fall short of your purposes for us.

**We confess it is easier for us to follow the crowd than follow Christ;
we prefer to avoid conflict rather than stand up for your mercy and
understanding. We allow strident voices in our times
to drown out your wisdom and truth.**

Forgive us, O God.

**Fill us with the courage to take up our cross and follow Jesus,
even when the cost to follow is high and reputations are at stake.**

Gracious God, as we hear the stories of Jesus' final days again,
help us listen as if we had never heard them before.
By the power of your Spirit, engage us, shock us, and pierce our hearts,
so that your undying love overwhelms us with mercy and grace
through Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

The Apostle Paul wrote: "This saying is sure and worthy of our full acceptance,
that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners".

It doesn't matter how big or how small our sins,
God's forgiving love in Jesus Christ can cover them all.

Trust that, in Christ, we are forgiven.

Be at peace with God, with yourself and with each other.

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Scripture Reading Luke 23:26-47

Message Jesus is Innocent

Not just once, but over and over again in the trial against Jesus, Pilate spoke words that indicated Jesus was innocent. Whatever the chief priests, the leaders, the people were saying, Pilate could not find any reason to go through with the demands of those present. In one fell swoop, we have gone from crowds shouting ‘Hosanna!’ to “Crucify him!”

Why? What had happened in that week from Sunday through Friday? Well, the systems of power had their way, just as those systems have their way today. We don’t need to look far at all to see how systems of power have made Putin think he has every right to pillage the Ukraine, and this is just the latest in stories of refugees across the globe trying to find safety, of people living in unjust societies, and the vulnerable being the victims in the story of power and prosperity for those who have the privilege to call the shots, figuratively and literally. Those stories hit as close to home as the people on our streets, with everything in between, the spouse or child who is battered and bruised, the manager who creates an environment of distrust and favoritism, or the hierarchies where you deal with the personalities that want to control.

Jesus died, not to pay a ransom for us and make the cross simply a victory over evil. Jesus did not die because we have sinned and so we deserve to die and go to hell, and in some twisted way Jesus death allows God to forgive us so that we can get to heaven. This is not about debts and payments. And Jesus did not die to show us how much we ought to love one another. That somehow the cross, where Jesus gives his life for us, is the ultimate expression of God’s love that should inspire us to love others as God has loved us. This is not fully what the cross is about. Each of these thoughts about the cross has merit. There can be a case made for each in scripture, but no one of these ideas changes us and what happened on the cross should change us. This isn’t just thinking about the cross, which all of the presented ideas do, but rather we are called to *experience* the cross.

Let’s see if we can unpack this a little further, knowing that we are not likely to come to some ultimate understanding, but maybe go far enough to start to question and ponder the story of Holy Week, from Palm Sunday through Good Friday to Easter Sunday in new ways, using a different lens that opens us to a life changing experience of the cross.

Jesus was innocent. We know that. Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” (v4). And after Jesus has been to Herod and sent back to Pilate, again he says to the chief priests, the leaders and the people, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death.” (vv13-15)

And a third time as the crowd shouts for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate says, "I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." (v22)

But those in power and a riled-up crowd took over and to appease the people Pilate gave in, sentencing Jesus to death on a cross. The most horrible death imaginable at the time. It was so horrible that no Roman citizen could be put to death in this way. But Jesus was not a Roman. Jesus was a Jew and the leaders in that religious element knew that only Pilate would be able to call for the kind of death they were looking for. They wanted Jesus gone, done, out of their hair and made an example of.

But the thing about God is that God takes the most unimaginable situations and can bring live out of horror. It does not mean that people are spared horror, even Jesus wasn't spared from death, but in Jesus' death there was a promise, the promise of life that comes out of death. Something we don't get to understand without Easter.

The cross makes us experience Jesus' death and resurrection and it brings meaning and purpose to our own lived experiences of death and dying into moments of fruitful living. Think of the many ways we suffer and struggle. We fail ourselves, our loved ones. If you think that you are not one who ever fails, then you may need to truly examine your way of being in the world. None of us escapes the hardships that life presents, the losses, the broken relationships, the difficulties. What God does through the cross, what was done to Christ was to offer life. That life comes through forgiveness, grace, and love.

Think of Jesus' life. He went about healing, teaching, and feeding people and everyone loves that part, but when Jesus offers forgiveness people get upset. They ask where does Jesus get off thinking that he has that kind of power. People don't want forgiveness, because forgiveness means they have done something wrong. We want to control our narrative, we want to be in charge of how we deal with all that happens to us and because of us, and it takes a lot to admit when one has committed an offense.

Jesus says, you are loved and you are forgiven, and you get to live your life in the power and light of the cross. Something happened on that day when Jesus died on the cross. It was something profound, something that seizes us, redeems us, touches us. It cannot be explained by some theory or idea, not that these are not helpful in our conversations, but ideas are not life giving, Jesus' death is what brings life. At 6:00 pm on the Friday evening everything changed. The light of life went from Jesus, but it was only the beginning of a new life and light that was to emerge.

In the coming days I invite you to think about the cross. What made the difference that Jesus hung there and then lay in a cold tomb? Just look at a cross and ponder the fact that Jesus did that for you, for me, because though his living was an example of how to be in the world, his death and resurrection said much more about the power of God to change us, to change how we live, right now, today. It is God's power that makes all the difference. It is greater than that of the most powerful leader, country, or system in the

world. It is the power of life for every human being. Each one made in love, created by love, and held by love.

Come to the cross, hear the words of the criminal who hung there with him, "This man has done nothing wrong." Jesus is innocent, but in love, meeting us where we are in our human flesh and frailness, takes on the cross, making it a symbol of life, and more importantly changing our lives with its power to bring life out of death. This is Jesus. This is the cross. This is love. This is God come to us. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Lord Jesus Christ,

You came to us in humility, reaching out to all God's little ones with mercy and compassion. You ask us to do the same.

So today we pray for all those who find themselves in humble circumstances:

For the homeless in our community and for refugees wherever they take shelter;

For the poor and all who find themselves without resources to cope these days;

For those who live in isolated communities in Canada and around the world, lacking access to care, resources and technology others take for granted.

Strengthen them in your mercy,

and humble us, lest we forget how much we have to be grateful for.

Lord Jesus Christ,

hear us as we pray for all those who have been humbled by life's unexpected turns during the months of the pandemic:

We remember before you

those who face illness, pain or injury;

those who have known death or disaster, fear or failure;

and all who struggle with anxiety and uncertainty.

We pray for victims of crime and those who suffer through the misjudgment or mistake of others.

And we pray for those who suffer because of the consequences of their own actions and choices.

Embrace them in your mercy,

and humble us, lest we imagine we can live lives untouched by trouble

Lord Jesus Christ,

hear us as we pray for those who have not learned the lessons of humility yet:

for those who live carelessly or drive recklessly,

endangering themselves and others;

for those who abuse the trust and power in their positions,

betraying those whose interests are in their hands;

And we pray for those who mislead others for gain

or indulge their fame with no thought for the example they set.

Humble them in your mercy,
And humble us if we are tempted to ignore the consequences of our own actions.

Lord Jesus Christ,
as we watch you walk to your Cross this week, fill us with humble gratitude that you go before us into any challenge or crisis we may face.
Give us courage to stand with others facing injustice or prejudice,
and give us words to speak out for those at risk at home or abroad,
for you have given us words to pray for the coming of your kingdom,
your reign of justice, mercy and peace. So we pray together:

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Invitation to the offering

With thankfulness we give in gratitude and joy.
With prayerfulness we give in sacrifice and love.
With hopefulness we give in commitment to God.

As we are people from different churches and places following this service. I encourage each of you to present your offering to God this day to your church community.

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information or to connect with me.

***Hymn** *What are these wounds in your hands, dear Saviour*

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1. What are these wounds in your hands, dear Saviour?
What are these wounds in your hands?
"These are the wounds with which I was wounded,
here in the house of my friends."
2. What are these wounds in your feet, dear Saviour?
What are these wounds in your feet?
"These are the wounds with which I was wounded,
here in the house of my friends."

3. What are these wounds on your brow, dear Saviour?

What are these wounds on your brow?

“These are the wounds with which I was wounded,
here in the house of my friends.”

4. What are these wounds in your side, dear Saviour?

What are these wounds in your side?

“These are the wounds with which I was wounded,
here in the house of my friends.”

5. What are these wounds in your heart, dear Saviour?

What are these wounds in your heart?

“These are the wounds with which I was wounded,
here in the house of my friends.”

Words: Zechariah 13:6; paraphrase, Rae E. Whitney Music: Amanda Husberg © 1994, Selah Publishing Co., Inc.
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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 Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
remain with you always. —based on Philippians 4:7, NRSV