

Call to Worship

The story of Palm Sunday tells of how
people removed their cloaks and spread them out
in front of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem.

The cloak we wear every day to face the world
is both the persona we wish to present,
and our defense against the elements.

As we come to worship may we be willing
at the feet of the One who sees us we really are.
to lay down our defenses and disguises,

And then, set free for worship,
may we offer our praises with open hearts and lives.

~ written by Ann Siddall, in *Lent to Easter liturgies: Year C*. Posted on the website
of the **Stillpoint Spirituality Centre**. <http://stillpoint.unitingchurchsa.org.au/>

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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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of majesty and mercy,
we worship today, as the Cross looms larger on the horizon.
We praise you for Jesus, the Ruler who came in humility to free us from captivity.
He came in mercy to free us from the sins we recognize in ourselves,
and the sins we easily overlook.

He came to show us the full extent of your mercy, love and justice.
So we praise you for your kindness and the strength you show to lift our burdens
and shoulder them for us in Christ Jesus.
We come in humility, knowing you have given us your all,
and we can never offer enough for such overwhelming love.

**God of mystery and mercy, your mercy and forgiveness is a mystery to us.
We fail to show mercy to others when they fall short of our expectations.
We keep silent rather than speak up when others are in trouble.
We prefer what is easy to what is right, even though your Spirit draws our
attention. We seek your forgiveness, O God, and ask that you make us more
forgiving. Inspire us with the costly choices Jesus made as he moved toward
the Cross, and give us the courage to follow him.**

God of courage and comfort,
as we follow the stories of Christ's journey to the Cross,
inspire us with the courage to follow him even when others turn against him.
And comfort us, knowing that you will walk with us through every challenge,
just as you walked with Jesus who is your Living Word. Amen.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Palm or Passion Sunday. April 2, 2023. Year A.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ – and Christ died for us; Christ rose
for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Believe the good news of
the gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free by God's generous grace.

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Scripture 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 fulfil 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 "Who is this?"

"Who is this?" That was the question from a whole city in turmoil as crowds gathered at the spectacle of a man entering the city on a donkey. Think of it. A donkey. The opposite of majestic. Picture it. Have you ever wondered what it looks like to have someone riding on a donkey? The round belly of a donkey does not lead to a graceful or dignified ride. Either one's knees are bent so that legs rest atop the belly or, legs are sticking straight out, as there is no just letting one's legs hang neatly as if riding a horse. And donkeys are small and when they run it is not the long graceful strides of the horse but jerky up and down motions, with the one on top bobbing just the same – up and down.

This story is set in the week of the Jewish festival of Passover. People were coming into the city of Jerusalem to celebrate, to visit the temple, and remember the story of their nation's liberation from slavery in Egypt. The passage is overflowing with connections between the story of Jesus and the story of the captivity and liberation of the people of Israel. We have to be told of the connections and layers, but the people in that day and time would have understood clearly what was going on. They would have noted the religious overtones and messages, which is why Jesus was a threat to the religious authorities who were all for status quo.

Not only that, stories, words, and rumors that Jesus was the Messiah set everyone on edge, as those who wanted to overthrow the establishment were ready to crown Jesus as a king, and those who felt threatened by the thought of another kingdom taking power led to a political response.

When the question was asked, "Who is this?" "The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'" Now there is a lot riding on this response. It has been three years. It was the response of people who were vulnerable, sick, dead or dying, hungry and thirsty, the broken in heart, mind, and body who had witnessed Jesus heal the sick, bring to life the dead, feed thousands at a time, and teach about what it meant to be loved and forgiven by God.

This was a climatic moment. Who is this? This is Jesus the healer, the teacher, the Son of God, and soon to be written on a board above his head on the cross, King of the Jews. For some the answer to "Who is this?" was, he is a threat, a person to be dealt with, a problem, a trouble maker. For others the answer was Lord and Saviour.

On this particular day in this town, he appeared to be the answer to all that was wrong. Though, how quickly the chants of Hosanna, which translates to save or help, I pray... how quickly the chants went from Hosanna to crucify him.

We can read what the response of those who lived at that time was to the question "Who is this?" But what about now? Who is this Jesus?

In the big picture, Jesus is the reason for the Christian church. Jesus was not Christian. Jesus was through and through Jewish. The Christian church came out of the continuing work of the disciples, and centuries of witness to the life changing, life giving, and life transforming experience of those who have followed in the way of Jesus. Those who have believed in the forgiveness, grace, hope, and love that is offered in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and provided a new way to be in relationship with God.

Still, the church does not seem to have the relevance that it once had. Yet, could it be that the way of Jesus, living as a Christian is still a cause for concern for those who would prefer the way of power over others rather than the message that all people matter, all are worthy of dignity, help, kindness, and consideration. That is the message of the gospel. Every life has value. Everyone should be given the opportunity for an abundant life especially those who are struggling. Especially those that society might deem unworthy of special attention, the poor, the homeless, the sick, the imprisoned, the addicted.

We tend to think people get what they deserve. If they are in a bad place, well they did it to themselves. Except that is only seeing one layer. Peel away the layers and we see how society has made other choices difficult. Pain, injustice, and inequity has caused some to not have the opportunities that others are given without question.

Who is this?

Who is this Jesus for you? Have you considered his life, this story of death, of love, of compassion, and new life? Have you considered its meaning for your own life?

Today you will hear some of the story of what took place after this triumphal entry into the city. Think of where you are in the story. Which characters do you identify with? How does this story of death and resurrection really intersect with your daily living? Consider too, what this means for our church. If we are truly the people of God, what does that mean for the present and future church?

Who is this? Who is this Jesus for you, for the church, and for the world? Not in some bygone area but today, right now, as we look around at each other, at our community, our country and the world. Who is this that has impacted the lives of generations of people and who now for us seems to have a dwindling impact on the lives of our children and grandchildren?

Does Jesus still matter? Can Jesus still transform lives and communities? Can Jesus transform us? Who is this that comes to take away the sins of the world and offers new life? Who is this?

Scripture Reading – Matthew 27:11-54

(If you are not watching the video you are encouraged to read this scripture on your own. It is too lengthy to reprint here. Rev. Joyce used The Message by Eugene Peterson for the video.)

Prayers of the People

God of courage and compassion,
as we follow Jesus toward the Cross this holy week,
we give you thanks that he faced his enemies with courage, not violence.
We are grateful he loved us enough to die for us, bearing every pain and sorrow
others inflicted. In Christ we trust that your love has power in every situation,
even the most troubling or tragic. So hear us as we bring to you the people and
places facing trouble and tragedy this day:

We pray for all struggling with poverty, sickness, or grief,
and any feeling overwhelmed by things beyond their control.

Stay with them day by day and restore their hope and health.

We pray for people and places facing violence, war and corruption,
and all who fear for what this day may bring.

Grant them courage and protection, and restore their hope and peace.

We pray for those who challenge tyranny, brutality and injustice,
and all who raise their voices for the vulnerable and victimized.

Give them strength and restore their hope and freedom.

We pray for all who face persecution because of racism, belief or identity,
and for each one who has been shamed or humiliated by someone more powerful.

Assure them of their value as your children 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 wherever they are needed.

Lord in your mercy; **Hear our prayer.**

God of courage and compassion, thank you for your love that never lets us go
and hear us as we pray the words Jesus taught us:

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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

Today we are reminded that Christ offered his life on the Cross for our sakes. Now it's our turn to offer God our gifts in gratitude, trusting God to use them to create new life in Jesus' name.

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Hymn

Christ is the King

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1. Christ is the King! O friends, rejoice;
brothers and sisters, with one voice
let the world know he is your choice.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
2. Oh magnify the Lord, and raise
anthems of joy and holy praise
for Christ's brave saints of ancient days.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
3. They with a faith forever new
followed the King, and round him drew
thousands of faithful servants true.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
4. O Christian women, Christian men,
all the world over, seek again
the way disciples followed then.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
5. Christ through all ages is the same:
place the same hope in his name,
with the same faith his word proclaim.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
6. Let love's unconquerable might
your scattered companies unite
in service to the Lord of light.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
7. So shall God's will on earth be done,
new lamps be lit, new tasks begun,
and the whole church at last be one.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!

'Christ is the King!' by G K A Bell (1883-1958). Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

Benediction

Go with courage to face the days ahead.
May the Christ who walks on wounded feet walk with you on the road.
May the Christ who serves with wounded hands stretch out your hands to serve.
May the Christ who lives with a wounded heart open your hearts to love.
May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet,
and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you.

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