

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 28, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 118)*

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

All: "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

One: "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!"

All: "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

One: "O give thanks to the Lord who is so good. God's steadfast love endures forever."

All: "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

***OPENING HYMN** "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna" GtG 197

One: Hosanna, loud hosanna,
the little children sang;

**All: through pillared court and temple
the joyful anthem rang.**

One: To Jesus, who had blessed them,
close folded to his breast,

**All: the children sang their praises,
the simplest and the best.**

One: From Olivet they followed
'mid an exultant crowd,
the victor palm branch waving,
and chanting clear and loud;

**All: the Lord of earth and heaven
rode on in lowly state,
nor scorned that little children
should on his bidding wait.**

One: "Hosanna in the highest!"

**All: That ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer;**

One: the Lord of heaven, our King.

**All: O may we ever praise him
with heart and life and voice,
and in his blissful presence
eternally rejoice.**

(Public Domain)

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Dear Lord, we say we believe in you,
but do we really mean it?**

**We say we trust you,
but do we really live it?**

**We say we know you,
but do our lives say something different?**

Forgive us, loving and merciful God.

Forgive our shallow faith and our superficial commitment.

**Fill us with your Spirit
that our hearts might cling to you.**

**Transform us by your power
that we might be faithful and true.**

**Re-make us in the image of your Son, Jesus Christ,
that we might reflect your glory
as your chosen and redeemed people.**

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: The Lord is a God of mercy and compassion. We know this for certain because of Jesus Christ.

All: In Christ, God seeks the lost and forgives the sinner and loves the world.

One: So let us hear and believe this wonderful, good news.

**All: That in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. In Jesus Christ we are loved.
Alleluia! Amen!**

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also with you.

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS Psalm 118:19-29

Mark 11:1-10

Psalm 118:19-29 (New Revised Standard Version)

- ¹⁹ *Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.*
- ²⁰ *This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.*
- ²¹ *I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.*
- ²² *The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.*
- ²³ *This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*
- ²⁴ *This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*
- ²⁵ *Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*
- ²⁶ *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.*
- ²⁷ *The Lord is God
and has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.*
- ²⁸ *You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.*
- ²⁹ *O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good,
for God's steadfast love endures forever.*

Mark 11:1-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ *When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² 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. ³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'"* ⁴ *They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying*

it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,
“Hosanna!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Plastic Palms and Hollow Hosannas” by Pastor Bill Vincent

In one of her earliest albums, Amy Grant, the contemporary Christian artist and country singer, sang,

**I have decided, I’m gonna live like a believer
...I’m gonna live what I believe.**
(Age to Age album, 1982)

Good words to sing.

But it's easy to sing such words. It's not so easy to live up to them.

Like the crowd that day entering Jerusalem:

“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!”

Singing the praises of Jesus. Maybe even ready to crown him king.

And as they witnessed his words and works those next few days, they became more and more excited.

And the large crowd was listening to him with delight. (Mark 12:37 NRSV)

But what a difference a couple of days make to have the crowd change its tune. For by the end of the week they were all too willing to condemn him and shout out,

“Crucify him! Crucify him!” (Mark 15:13&14 NRSV)

It seems maybe those shouts of praise and “Hosanna” were hollow. And those palms – well, the branches themselves may have been real, but the service and worship they symbolized were not.

But let us not be too hard on the crowd.

What about us?

How do we shout hollow hosannas to our King? With words of praise and promise that ring hollow because of actions that follow...or do not. Choices that reveal our lack of understanding and commitment.

Hollow hosannas – that so readily turn into jeers and mockery and cries of “Crucify him!”

How do we place plastic palms before our Lord? Offering lip service and worship that is pure ostentation.

Plastic palms that don’t involve the living stuff of our lives; that don’t cost us anything; that have no heart or life in them. We simply go through the motions, playing at church instead of living our faith.

Do we get all caught up in the excitement of the moment and say things we don’t really mean – we don’t really put our heart into – and when the time comes to stand up and be counted, we’re nowhere to be found? Do we do things simply because everyone else is doing them; but when the time comes to render our true service to God and neighbor, we beg off and make excuses and quietly slip out the back?

Reminds me of a certain seed about which we know.

Remember the story Jesus told?

A sower went out to sow. And as he was throwing seed about (the way they did it back then),

some seed...fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. ... And [as the explanation goes] these are the ones who...when they hear the word...immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. (Mark 4:4,5-6,16-17 NRSV)

“Fair weather” Christians we call them: swept up in the moment; lacking gumption, or whatever it is it takes to stand up for what one believes. No depth of commitment, either because they didn’t understand or they were unwilling to give so much of themselves to something, and that may be because of fear or selfishness.

Is that what our commitment is like, lacking depth?

Or do we indeed have a certain rootedness that gives our commitment strength and endurance?

Real commitment has depth to it, you see, involving a sense of integrity with the conviction to stand up for what we believe.

Such depth of commitment takes understanding, heart, trust.

Do we understand what it means to follow Jesus Christ? The crowd didn’t, and neither did the disciples – not fully, not yet.

Do we know what we’re getting into when we say, “I have decided to follow Jesus”? Remember he says to us, “Take up your cross and follow me.” Are we willing to give of ourselves that much – all the way? to give of ourselves from the heart?

Are we willing to trust in this carpenter turned itinerant preacher? Are we willing to trust him unto death ... and beyond?

It is so easy to say, “We commit”; to say, “We’re with you, Jesus.”

But when push comes to shove, is it a hollow promise?

It is said that

The way people spend their time and their money is a pretty good indicator of their sense of values and of their relationship with God. (“Bulletin Inserts,” Pulpit Helps)

So how do we spend our time and our money, and what does that say about our relationship with God and especially about our depth of commitment? When the moment of decision comes, are we willing to lay it all on the line for what we say we believe?

Thank goodness God’s promises are not hollow, but solid, true, and sure. And thank God – literally, let us thank God – that, when the moment of decision came, Jesus was willing to lay his life on the line for what he said he believed.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, he

prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said “Abba, Father, ...remove this cup from me...” (Mark 14:35&36 NRSV)

This cup of suffering and death. Jesus knew the consequences that were bearing down on him, threatening to roll right over him. He understood the cost and the risk. But the conclusion of his prayer was,

“...yet, not what I want, but what you want.” (Mark 14:36 NRSV)

He was willing to put his whole heart into the task; willing to give totally of himself.

And then trust in God. And his trust in God was nowhere more evident than while on the cross, saying,

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46 NRSV)

The evening before, even before they went to Gethsemane to pray,

Jesus said to his disciples, “You will all become deserters....” Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But Peter said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same. (Mark 14:27,29-31 NRSV)

And they all fell flat on their promise.

Those words must have rung hollow and bitter in Jesus’s mind as he hung on the cross.

But the story does not end there.

And therein lies our hope: hope even for those of us who give fake palms of service and shout empty hosannas of praise.

For there is hope for us just as there was hope for the first disciples. Their record certainly wasn’t very good. They still didn’t understand Jesus and his mission – not a one of them. And yes, Peter denied him. And all abandoned him.

And yet these same disciples serve to illustrate the redeeming nature of this one whom the crowd greeted – and later jeered.

For remember the dramatic change that took place following that week.

The women went to the tomb, and there an angel told them,

“Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.” (Mark 16:7 NRSV)

Lamar Williamson observes,

The falling away of the disciples and the denial of Peter are not the end of God's plans for them. In the command of the angel to the women lies the promise of forgiveness and restitution, of a renewed call and a fresh start for disciples chastened by failure and empowered by the resurrection.

(Interpretation, p.284)

Witness that change: from people who flee, to people who carry a spark to the ends of the earth – a spark that reaches down to us even today. Witness such a transformation in those people, and you will see the creating and re-creating power of God: power to forgive and restore, renew and re-form. A power so great that – miracle of miracles! – even plastic palms might sprout and take root and bear real fruit. A power so great that even hollow hosannas might ring true and share the truth of the one who indeed comes in the name of the Lord.

Now let me be clear: God is not pleased with our moments of hollow commitment and insincere service.

But God can and does transform and use even our short-comings to God's purposes.

The final proof of that is the crucifixion itself: the ultimate symbol of human misunderstanding and the abuse of God's purposes. Yet even here on the cross, God was able to transform that tragedy into the very triumph of life over death, of good over evil.

And so, here at the foot of the cross we know that we who often offer hollow commitment and insincere service do have hope. For we too can be transformed, like those first disciples, so that we might offer the real stuff of our lives in service – live palms. We can be transformed that we might shout sincere and honest praises to our God – true hosannas.

I have decided, I'm gonna live like a believer

...I'm gonna live what I believe.

May that be our conviction: to live what we say we believe.

And in those times when we fail, let us trust in our Lord who never fails. Let us trust in our Lord to renew us and transform us, that we might blossom with the fruit of faithfulness and truth, shouting praises and hosannas full of gusto and conviction, offering palm branches of service and worship full of faithfulness and life – our life and his.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *The Apostles' Creed*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,**

was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Translation reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright
1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Save us, O Lord...
People: ...for your mercy is great.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (*Contemporary*)

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.

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

What you have done for us is marvelous in our eyes, gracious God.
Our gifts can never match your goodness toward us. Your saving grace,
your healing light, your personal sacrifice are so far beyond our imagining!
We can only offer ourselves, all we have and all we are, in response to the
coming of Christ Jesus. Hosanna in the highest! Receive, O God, our
humble service. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “So Let Our Lips and Lives Express”

One: So let our lips and lives express
the holy gospel we profess;

**All: so let our works and virtues shine,
to prove the doctrine all divine.**

One: Thus shall we best proclaim abroad
the honors of our Savior God,

**All: when his salvation reigns within,
and grace subdues the power of sin.**

(Public Domain)

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

The Prayers of the People (adapted) are used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2014.

The Prayer of Dedication is reprinted by permission of United Church Press from *Led by Love* by Lavon Bayler. Copyright 1996 by United Church Press.

Our Maundy Thursday service is this week, April 1st, at 7:00 pm. We will join with our sisters and brothers of the First Presbyterian Church of Union in a joint service via Zoom. Those with email will receive the link for the service later this week. If you do not have email, you are strongly encouraged to join in with one of the phone numbers listed below. (Be prepared to enter in the Meeting ID # and then the Passcode #.)

Communion will be shared, so don't forget to have your communion elements at hand for the service.

*Maundy Thursday service: April 1, 7:00 pm – via Zoom

Dial by your location

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

Meeting ID: 861 3684 5692

Passcode: 308110