

Worship March 28, 2021

Welcome

Before we start our worship service I am going to review for you a few “churchy” words that you will hear me use.

First:

Palm Sunday – the Sunday before Easter, when the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is celebrated in many Christian churches.

Why Palms - the scripture story tells of people taking palm branches and laying them on the ground and waving them in the air to celebrate Jesus entering the city.

You might also ask what a cloak is? – well we would call it a coat or jacket that we wear.

The word Hosanna(s) – is an expression of adoration, praise, or joy.

Broken Hallelujahs While Hallelujah means ‘praise God’, it is also an expression of intense joy so a Broken Hallelujah is a praise to God when the normal and even the negative happen to us and still we praise God.

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 to lay down our defenses and disguises, at the feet of the One who sees us as we really are.

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

Opening Prayer

Today we sing our hosannas to you, Lord Jesus. Despite our distance, we all praise and celebrate your coming, together! In the midst of our joy, we also raise our cold and broken hallelujahs. In the strength of your Spirit, help us. Amen.

Blessing of the palms

We remember all those who stepped out of the way,
They threw down their coats and palm branches to say,
“Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is the One!
Who comes in the name of the Lord, God’s own Son!”

As we raise our voices and Lift High the Cross,
We think of this man who knew suffering and loss,
Who on a donkey, did ride through the town,
Who raised up the people and put power down.

We bless these branches today in this place,
These palms that are waved, will bring joy to each face,
As we celebrate Jesus, the one who did come
So that **everyone** would know God’s love, not just some.

This Jesus did come to lift up the lowly

And remind us all that each person is holy.
So raise up your palms and sing out with a shout
As the story unfolds, love is what it's about!

Hymn UMH # 278 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna Rev. Penny Bonsell

Finlayson, MN

Scripture Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 27:15-23 NRSV

Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately.^[a]" ⁴ This 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."

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd^[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The 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!"

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Matthew 27:15-23

Barabbas or Jesus?

¹⁵ Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus^[a] Barabbas. ¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus^[b] Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"^[c] ¹⁸ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus

killed. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ²³ All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³ Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

Meditation

Please pray with me.

Amazing God, we come before you and long to know you better. Help us to see the ways you call us and live into being the person you have created us to be. Imprint your message of love on our hearts, so that all we do in your name is a witness to your grace. Amen.

We have two parts to our scripture reading today first we will look at Matthew 21:1-11 the story of Jesus grand entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on a humble donkey may have seemed unremarkable at a glance, but in reality, His arrival fulfilled a prophecy of the long-promised King.

Our scripture today is from the book of Matthew although can be found in the other gospels as well.

Matthew's gospel was written for a Jewish audience. And there are more references to Old Testament text found in Matthew's gospel than in any of the other gospels. The author was constantly reminding his Jewish readers of the connection between the Old Testament prophecies/the promises and the New Testament person and work of Jesus.

Here we have Jesus approaching the holy city. And the secret that He has been carefully guarding during His earthly ministry is about to be disclosed, as Jesus is going to make a public display, identifying Himself to some degree with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah. Now, we may miss some of the imagery here and its significance. Because we would think, well, if Jesus really wants to announce that He is the long-awaited Messiah, why doesn't He ride into Jerusalem in a golden chariot or a magnificent white stallion?

Well, I suspect the reason is that in the Old Testament, the prophesy proclaimed by the Prophet Zachariah, for example, talked about the coming of Jerusalem's King, who would be riding on the foal of a donkey: "Lo, your king comes to you triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. and is a cause for the celebration of the daughters of Jerusalem".

So Jesus makes careful preparations for this entry. He doesn't just casually walk into the city. He said, "Now I want you to go to this certain place and get this donkey that no one has ever ridden before, and bring it here. And if they ask you what you're doing making this request, you just tell them, "The Lord has need of it," and they'll give it to you".

And so, this is part of the preparation, the setting of the stage for the entry into Jerusalem itself. "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'Tell the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Can you imagine the crowd gathered, the cheering, the cumulative noise, the joyful chaos?

The crowd on that Sunday before Easter, as we know it, was large and scripture says they 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 Jesus and the crowds 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!”

Can being a part of a crowd can change you. More than a century ago, the French social psychologist Gustave le Bon argued that the power of a crowd was enough to swallow whole a person’s individual identity, leaving behind an easily manipulated shell in a state not unlike hypnosis.

Once part of the group, he wrote in his 1895 book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, rationality was replaced by “impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgement of the critical spirit.”

And crowds haven’t really recovered from their bad rap since then. More often than not, discussion of crowd psychology includes terms like mob mentality and herd mentality, — things that focus on the group’s hold over people, rather than the people that make up the group.

Being part of a crowd can be a powerful experience. The crowds in Jerusalem moved from the joy of Palm Sunday’s “Hosannas” to the jeers and taunts of Good Friday’s “Crucify Him!”

Our second scripture reading today is Matthew 27:15-23 and I am going to read it a second time and this time from The Message.

Barabbas or Jesus?

¹⁵⁻¹⁸ It was an old custom during the Feast for the governor to pardon a single prisoner named by the crowd. At the time, they had the infamous Jesus Barabbas in prison. With the crowd before him, Pilate said, “Which prisoner do you want me to pardon: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus the so-called Christ?” He knew it was through sheer spite that they had turned Jesus over to him.

¹⁹ While court was still in session, Pilate’s wife sent him a message: “Don’t get mixed up in judging this noble man. I’ve just been through a long and troubled night because of a dream about him.”

²⁰ Meanwhile, the high priests and religious leaders had talked the crowd into asking for the pardon of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus.

²¹ The governor asked, “Which of the two do you want me to pardon?”

They said, “Barabbas!”

²² “Then what do I do with Jesus, the so-called Christ?”

They all shouted, “Nail him to a cross!”

²³ He objected, “But for what crime?”

But they yelled all the louder, “Nail him to a cross!”

“Let him be crucified!”

What happened to the crowd that cheered Jesus into Jerusalem? One wonders, are some of the people that cheered and laid down their cloaks and palm branches now calling for His crucifixion?

How can we get caught up in the crowd, and how can we fix our eyes on Jesus?

I've tried to think of a time that I was caught up in a crowd where the mood shifted, and I was suddenly frightened, scared or nervous to be in the group. A story about me does not come to mind but I think about those that were in the wrong place at the wrong time in Minneapolis this last summer.

There are stories about those that were peacefully protesting or just observing and suddenly found themselves caught up in a crowd that was hell-bent on destruction. We know that some were there to cause trouble, to destroy property and steal what they could. But others were there for peaceful purposes and got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. We will never know how many that were there for peaceful purposes may have been sucked up into the mob mentality of the crowd.

Do you behave differently around certain people or in certain settings? Have you said or not said things because of how you believed they would be received by the crowd you found yourself in? Think about groups at school, work, family gatherings, concerts, sporting events and even church.

I admit there are times as recently as last weekend that I have found myself using language that I normally do not use. I was with high school friends; some I hadn't seen for 40 plus years. At one point in the day I realized I had sworn a few times, nothing outrageous, but certainly words that I normally do not use. Caught up in the crowd I spoke words I normally do not use. My language changed with the situation I was in. Did I revert back to high school? I do not know but something changed.

Many in the crowd thought Jesus would be a messiah, a powerful leader who would overthrow the Roman occupation. At the time, there were extremists and bandits who identified as messiahs and promised to free the Jewish people. How is Jesus different? The "humble king" on a donkey signaled that Jesus wasn't the type of messiah they expected.

How did those who welcomed Jesus in Matthew 21 end up calling for his crucifixion in Matthew 27? A change of opinion about Jesus as messiah has clearly taken place. While the two crowds may not have been made up of exactly the same people, a change of opinion about Jesus as messiah had happened.

During the time period between the two texts

- Jesus has thrown salespeople out of the temple,
- Jesus has repeatedly called the religious elite "hypocrites" for not behaving in line with their beliefs,
- Jesus said that the lowlifes of society will inherit the kingdom of God because of their good hearts, and Jesus
- predicted that the temple – the center of religious life, will be destroyed.

The people wanted a messiah who would throw out the Rome occupiers, not challenge their way of life! But they got a messiah that would challenge them greatly.

The crowd in Matthew 27:17 is asked who they would like Pilate to release: Jesus, the son of God, or Barabbas, a military leader of the Jewish resistance to Roman occupation. Would they rather release a criminal, who would use violence to get his way, or an innocent man who challenged the structure of violence and challenged people to live more lovingly?

We are called to answer this day and every day:

- who do you follow?
- What changes because of that choice?
- What do we learn about Jesus and the nature of God through this ordeal?

Who do you follow? What changes in your life because of that choice? Think about how other people influence your decisions and your willingness to truly follow Jesus.

How could you model a life of love and grace to your family, your coworkers, and your community? What voices and influences need to increase, and which need to decrease in your awareness to make this possible?

Why did the crowd choose to release Barabbas instead of Jesus? Jesus invited people from all walks of life, even those who would have been opposed to each other in society, to eat at the same table and to share in the same ministry of love and justice. How does this reconciliation bring you hope?

Why do crowds still often move toward choosing violence over peace and dialogue?

My friends you and I need to be the type of people that include everyone. We need to be a people of love. We need to care for those that are in need and those that are different than us.

We need to be the people that cheer for Jesus everyday and not just on Sunday.

What steps can we take to make the changes needed to be people that cheer for Jesus every day?

- Spend time in prayer and study every day
- Share the story of the scripture we read today with your family and friends challenging them to be people that cheer for Jesus every day
- Love your neighbor as yourself modeling the behavior of Jesus

Please pray with me

Lord, we come to prepare for the holiest of weeks. We will journey to follow you, we will sing your praises "Hosanna, Hosanna." But all too soon we will join the crowds with shouts to crucify you. Forgive us for our weakness. Remind us of your mercy and love. Empower us to go into this world full of goodness and grace, so that all may know love. Amen.

Prayer

Merciful God, as we enter Holy week, turn our hearts again to Jerusalem, and to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Stir up within us the gift of faith that we may not only praise him with our lips, but may follow him in the way of the cross.

God who reigns, so many powers push and pull us, threatening to overwhelm and destroy. We hear tempting promises, and we believe them; we are persuaded by the allure of self-preservation; we follow the crowd instead of risking vulnerability. Fix our eyes on you, that we would not be led astray. Forgive us for the times we have wandered and draw us home again. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Amen.

O Lord, who on this day entered the rebellious city that later rejected you:

we confess that our wills are as rebellious as Jerusalem's,
that our faith is often more show than substance,
that our hearts are in need of cleansing.

Have mercy on us, son of David, Savior of our lives.

Help us to lay at your feet all that we have and all that we are, trusting you to forgive what is sinful, to heal what is broken, to welcome our praises, and to receive us as your own.

And together in the name of Christ, we pray.

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 trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering

In Christ's humility, we find victory. In Christ's righteousness, we find hope. In Christ's suffering, we find salvation. In Christ's love, we are made whole. In the name of Jesus Christ, praise God, we are forgiven! In the name of Jesus Christ, praise God, we are forgiven! Offering Introduction: Today, more than ever, the world needs to hear our voices joined together. We do that with our prayers, our witness, and our gifts. (Instruct on how people can give online, by mail, or as appropriate to your church context).

Special Music

Praise Is Rising Medley

Mora UMC Praise Team

Arranged by Russell Mauldin

Prayer of Dedication

Holy God, in times where crowds may be shouting one thing or another, we join our voices together to shout your praises. We honor your great gift to us, by giving you these gifts, by giving you our praise, and giving you our worship. Receive these gifts today, great and holy God, in the name of

Hymn TFWS # 2112 Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley

Benediction

And so it begins, we walk through this week, from palms now to passion, it is Jesus we seek.
Each moment we walk through these days with Jesus, is time to see people, the way Jesus...sees us.

To watch for the ones, who need hope, who need kindness.

Seeking the light, not the darkness that blinds us.

As you walk through these days, may the love you now know

Be spread to each person you meet on the go.

And may God who now blesses and keeps you in love

Whose face shines upon you with grace from above

Who looks on you with such joy and such favor,

This God, three in One gives you peace - life to savor. Amen!

Announcements

- Maundy Thursday worship is at 7pm, April 1 at the Mora UM church
- Worship is available Easter morning on-line at 10:30 am and in-person at 9am in Ogilvie and 10:30 am in Mora. Join online or in-person for worship. Protocols are in place and will be followed according to the MDH and CDC including social distancing and masking.