

Howick Presbyterian Church Service of Worship Palm Sunday, 5th April 2020 @ Home

Good morning everyone, and welcome to our Palm Sunday stay at home service! Here are a few of the basic instructional notes again.

I would like to encourage you if possible to do this service at 9:30am on Sunday; the time we would usually meet most weeks. Otherwise, just whenever suits.

There are a few ways to do this!

- Some of you may just like to read your way through the Service text.
- Hopefully most of you will watch the pre-recorded Youtube video alongside the text.
- Some may just watch the video.

Just do what is easiest for you. Wherever there is bold text in the Order of service, feel free to say the words out loud with me.

The link to the video will have sent with this email. It will also be on the website. Just click on the link and it should take you to Youtube where the video will be.

*** This next part is optional!** You may want to create a special environment to have this time in, maybe on a table next your device, TV, or computer. As this Sunday is Palm Sunday, if you have a palm plant in a pot, or a branch/leaf in your back yard, bring it in. If you have a nice candle you can **safely** use, you could light that as a symbol to remind you of Jesus, the Light of the world being with you. (Please do this safely and keep the candle away from anything flammable.) You can place a bible on the table to remind you that we gather around God's word to be fed by it. If you have a special cup put some juice or wine in it, and bring a little bread. Place this on your table too, to remind you not only of the Lord's Supper, but also Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jesus the bread of life. The one who gives drink that quenches the thirst of the soul. The cup and bread also reminds you that the table we sit at each week is the table Jesus sets for us, invites us to and leads us in worship at. These are just a few idea's to help create a special space at home, but any space can be special/sacred so it's up to you.

During some parts of the service, there will be space given for you to think about something, say something out loud if you want to, and pray. I will lead the songs – please sing along as best you can and stand if you wish, or remain seated. Up to you! The lyrics are in the Service text.

Even though we are all at home, I pray that each of you would have a sense that we are connected in this together, and that even when we are separated by geographical distance, Christ still unites us.

I also appreciate that a lot of other churches have made online Services too. Please feel free to watch those also at other times if you wish to. There is no pressure to only share in our one. ☺ At the same time, it is also good for our individual faith communities to stay connected, so I hope our own service can help do that.

Grace and Peace

Matt

CALL TO WORSHIP (based on Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118:26, 28-29)

Matt: Rejoice greatly, O people of Zion!
 Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!
 Look, your king is coming to you.
 He is righteous and victorious,
 yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—
 even on a donkey's colt.

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

Matt: You are our God, and we will praise You!

All: You are our God, and we will exalt You!

Matt: O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.

All: His faithful love endures forever!

Let us worship God!

Let's sing, Mighty to Save

SONG: MIGHTY TO SAVE

Everyone needs compassion
 A love that's never failing
 Let mercy fall on me
 Everyone needs forgiveness
 The kindness of a Saviour
 The hope of nations

*Saviour, he can move the mountains
 My God is mighty to save
 He is mighty to save
 Forever Author of Salvation
 He rose and conquered the grave
 Jesus conquered the grave*

So take me as you find me
 All my fears and failures
 Fill my life again
 I give my life to follow
 Everything I believe in
 Now I surrender

Bridge: Shine your light and let the whole world see
 We're singing for the glory of the risen king Jesus [2x]

OPENING PRAYER

Gathering for worship in our homes today,

we are reminded of the crowd that lined the streets,
witnessing your entry into Jerusalem.

Some of us gather, full of enthusiasm.
Some of us gather wearied by what life has thrown at us, especially the last few weeks.

Some of us come out of curiosity.
Some of us out of habit.
Some of us are here because somebody told us we had to!
Some of us gather with great expectation.

Some of us with no particular hopes.

It is here, God, that you meet us and greet us and, if we will allow,
It is here that you surprise us with your hope, love and your grace.

So open our heavy eyes, and tired minds,
steal into our closed hearts and surprise us today with hope and joy.

Quell those unrealistic expectations, but open us to the possibility of hope
and allow us to glimpse the goodness of your purpose for us.

Even when we cannot name it ourselves you know what ails us.
We submit to your knowledge of us and we open ourselves to the need for your forgiveness; a
forgiveness that comes freely and abundantly.

So with cleansed hearts and open minds, we join in the cry Hosanna!

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

We pray as you taught us to pray together:

***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,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

KIDS TIME AND BIRTHDAYS/ANNIVERSARIES

Hello to any boys and girls who are reading, listening to or watching this!

How are you getting on this week? What sort of things have you been doing at home?

My kids have been doing some baking, playing outside, making cards for grandparents, going for bike rides around our neighbourhood, device time, and watching family movies together.

Like I said last week, thank you kids for staying at home! You are helping our country stop the spread of the virus. Great job!

I have a story I'd like to read for you...

Today we also celebrate everyone who had a birthday or anniversary this week. We give thanks to God for your life amongst us! You have made this world so much better for so many! This will probably be one of the stranger birthdays you've had but you are still worth celebrating!

KIDS PRAYER

God of love and hope,
you made the world and care for all creation,
but the world feels strange right now.
The news is full of stories about Coronavirus.
Some people are worried that they might get ill.
Others are anxious for their family and friends.
Be with them and help them to find peace.
We pray for the doctors and nurses and scientists,
and all who are working to discover the right medicines
to help those who are ill.
Thank you that even in these anxious times,
you are with us.
Help us to put our trust in you and keep us safe.
Amen.

What do we say each week? "God loves us and we are special!"

SONG: God will make a way

God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way

He works in ways we cannot see
 He will make a way for me

He will be my guide
 Hold me closely to His side
 With love and strength for each new day
 He will make a way, He will make a way

*By a roadway in the wilderness, He'll lead me
 And rivers in the desert will I see
 Heaven and Earth will fade but His word will still remain
 And He will do something new today*

READINGS

Our readings today are Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 and Matt 21:1-11

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
 his love endures forever.
 Let Israel say:
 "His love endures forever."

Open for me the gates of the righteous;
 I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.
 This is the gate of the Lord
 through which the righteous may enter.
 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
 you have become my salvation.
 The stone the builders rejected
 has become the cornerstone;
 the Lord has done this,
 and it is marvelous in our eyes.
 The Lord has done it this very day;
 let us rejoice today and be glad.
 Lord, save us!
 Lord, grant us success!
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
 From the house of the Lord we bless you.
 The Lord is God,
 and he has made his light shine on us.
 With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
 up to the horns of the altar.
 You are my God, and I will praise you;
 you are my God, and I will exalt you.
 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
 his love endures forever.

Matthew 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

“Say to Daughter Zion,

‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

SERMON – “THE TRIUMPHANT ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM”

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of what the Christian community call Holy Week. The days leading up to and including the death and resurrection of Jesus.

As Jesus and his disciples approach Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, several things wait for him there.

This is the place where his mission will reach its most treacherous stage.

Religious leaders are waiting, plotting his death.

Spiritual forces of evil are working against him.

There is of course the ongoing weight of the Roman occupation.

The Roman Empire insisted that it was bringing peace to the world through its massive military might. Anybody who didn't see it this way just might be put on a cross.

One of the most significant things that is happening in Jerusalem right now is the celebration of Passover.

There are at least 2-3 hundred thousand Jews coming into Jerusalem, including pilgrims from around that part of the world. Some suggest the city may have been packed with up to a million people in total.

The people are there to remember the time when God delivered them from the hands of an imperial ruler. **Pharaoh.**

They are also very aware that they are still suffering under the hand of an imperial ruler. **Caesar.**

Put these two things together and you have a volatile mix. The spirit of rebellion and religious fervour is in the air. They are longing for deliverance again. There are whispers that this Jesus of Nazareth could in fact be the long hoped for Messiah, who would come and restore the Kingdom of Israel, and lead an uprising against the Romans.

And so we have the Roman Governor of Judea – Pontius Pilate. He will come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival to make sure things stay under control.

When Pilate would enter the city, there would be a particular weight to it. The entry of royalty into a city was a public affair of pomp and circumstance from a Jewish and Roman point of view.

When Pilate entered the city, he would come from Caesarea in the west, riding on a war horse, surrounded by soldiers. This entrance would be a reminder of the ruling empire, and a warning to people to stay in their place. It was an entry designed to intimidate.

This is what makes Jesus' entry all the more fascinating.

Jesus enters from the Mount of Olives, from the east, riding not on a war horse – but a donkey – a symbol of peace.

And instead of being surrounded by military power, he is surrounded by ordinary people, children, and pilgrims, being joyful. Jesus entry is a public and intentional fulfillment of Zech 9:9

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion, Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

The people lay down their cloaks and wave Palm branches. In ancient times, palm branches symbolized goodness, well-being, and victory.

They cry out, “Hosanna” which means “*Save now.*” It’s an oppressed peoples cry to their saviour and king. (Which would later become a statement of praise.)

They also call out words from Psalm 118: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

This is a beautiful moment. A wonderful welcome. A prophetic, symbolic statement.

But there is also a sadness that lingers in this story, based on a misunderstanding of Jesus and his mission.

Their hope was for a Messianic military leader who would lead a war against the Romans and restore the Kingdom of Israel.

Jesus would end up disappointing them, for that was not the approach God had in mind.

Ironically Ps 118:22 contains the line *“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”* Jesus would quote this the next day in the temple.

He was a different kind of King. And most of the people just don’t get it.

Later that week, many of the same voices welcoming him would be shouting “Crucify him!”

There are three things I want to touch on from this moment.

1. First of all, what might Palm Sunday be telling us about God?

God is doing things differently.

God is not fighting back with the same weapons as the enemy.

The Roman Empire insisted that it was bringing peace to the world through its massive military might, and anybody who didn’t see it this way just might be put on a cross. Emperor Caesar was considered the “Son of God,” the “Prince of Peace,” and one of his propaganda slogans was “Peace through victory.”

The insistence of the first Christians was through this resurrected Jesus, God has made peace with the world. Not through weapons of war but through a naked, bleeding man hanging dead on a Roman execution stake. Another of Caesars favourite propaganda slogans was “Caesar is Lord.” The first Christians said “Jesus is Lord.” For them, Jesus was another way, a better way, a way that made the world better through sacrificial love, not coercive violence.

“Jesus Wants to Save Christians.”

Humans often revert to intimidation and violence to find conquest and victory.

Jesus is showing us another way. Jesus will not overcome the Kingdom of Rome, the corrupt religious leaders, nor the forces of evil with their own weapons. Instead he chooses sacrificial love.

2. Secondly, there’s some powerful symbolism in looking at the way Pilate would enter a city, and the way Jesus does in this story.

It’s been said, “there are 2 ways to enter a city – the way of Pilate or the way of Jesus.”

There are 2 ways to

Enter a conversation

Treat your family

Deal with conflict
 Deal with pain
 Treat your friends
 Treat your enemies

The way of Pilate or the way of Jesus.

What is your approach to these situations? Reverting to aggression, intimidation and conflict?

Or is it the way that seeks a resolution through self-giving love, and forgiveness?

Everyday we are forced to make that choice – the way of Jesus – or the way of Pilate – the way of the world.

3. Finally, what does Palm Sunday tell us about ourselves?

For many people it's easy to love God when we think he's doing what we want him to do. We find being enthusiastic and committed very easy when things are going how we want.

It also highlights to us that when God's plan departs from what we want, we can often become fearful and violent, lashing out at anyone, even the one who comes to save us.

We too are capable of giving up on God when he doesn't deal with things the way we expect him too.

- Disease
- Death
- Enemies

So we throw God, or the idea of God out to be crucified just outside of town.

We have to expect that there will be times when we don't get it. When we don't understand why God is not acting as we think he should.

In fact, this happens throughout the bible all the time. People think God should do certain things, and he does it differently. Or God's idea of who's in and who's out being very different to our own.

We can't understand why things are happening the way they are, in the same way many can't understand why Jesus won't get down off the cross and vanquish his enemies.

God is saving the world, not by human wisdom, which is so often tainted with lust for power, violence and revenge, but by His wisdom. His ways are higher than our ways.

God is suffering alongside us, dying alongside us, then breaking free of death and evil on the third day and inviting us to belongside him in resurrection.

All we can do is trust and follow the example he gives us.

I would like to read this Palm Sunday Confession, from the perspective of the crowd in Jerusalem. This confession was written by Rev Malcolm Gordon.

O Jesus our king, riding into the capital city for the great show down with the powers of evil and corruption.

*You are known as a man of peace but you might want to think about that
For those you are up against are merciless and cruel
And the only place you'll end up by turning the other cheek
Is high on a criminal's cross.*

O Jesus our king, riding into our hopes for redemption;

Where is your sword and where is your army?

This ragtag rabble of rascals and rednecks from the sticks aren't going to fill any of your enemies with fear.

Just say the word, and we'll throw down our palm branches and take up our spears, hidden away all these years.

Cast off the disguise of peace maker and we will rally to you in a heartbeat.

O Jesus our King, beware my friend.

There are rumours that some who are close to you cannot be trusted.

That some want to force the fight you seem eager to lose

And this talk of taking up your cross – it's making the troops nervous.

Give us victory, fire us up, we're ready to fight and kill and die.

We are like a storm cloud ready to burst;

A wave ready to swell up and then break.

Just tell us which way we should surge.

Make it soon, or there's no telling what we'll do.

O Jesus our king, you mock us.

You refuse to claim the throne we offer.

You've taken hold of our hearts, but you have rejected our fists.

And anyone can tell you that's no way to rule.

So we've no use for you, you peacemaking poet from up north,

For the villains we face come with razor sharp swords.

Take your stories and die, they're no good to us.

It's going to take more to save us than your foolish love.

O Jesus our king, all the clamour and noise

For you to reign on high.

For you to be cursed and die

Have all faded and gone,

Like seed that springs up in the shallow soil.

But you were still like sleep

In the midst of the storm.

You were the point of persistent peace

While we all wanted war

Now our rage is all spent

We wonder

Are you?

BREAD AND WINE

Traditionally we would share celebrate Communion on the first Sunday of the month. Since we can't be geographically in the same place, instead in our homes we will each take some bread and wine/juice and through these things remember the life of Christ, his death and resurrection, his presence with us now, and his coming again to complete his reconciling work. We remember that we share and take part in these things also. May the peace of Christ be with each of you.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION – From the Christian Aid Website.

Loving God,
strengthen our innermost being
with your love that bears all things
even the weight of this global pandemic
even the long haul of watching for symptoms
of patiently waiting for this to pass
watching and waiting,
keeping our gaze fixed on you,
and looking out for our neighbours
near and far.

*Instil in our shaken souls
the belief and hope that all things
are possible with your creative love
for strangers to become friends
for science to source solutions
for resources to be generously shared
so everyone, everywhere, may have what they need
That your perfect love that knows no borders
may cast out any fear and selfishness that divides.*

May your love that never ends
be our comfort, strength and guide
for the wellbeing of all and
the glory of God.

We know name out loud or in our hearts those people who we are concerned for at this time.

God, give inward and outward tools to help these people move forward. We love them.

*Restoring and healing God,
thank you for medical workers everywhere,
embodying sacrificial love in these challenging times
putting the welfare of others before their own*

*staying away from their family and loved ones
 comforting the concerned and bereaved
 reassuring the anxious and vulnerable
 working to heal and restore people who are ill.
 Be their guide, strength, wisdom and hope.*

We pray for those in authority to do right by them
 for proper protective equipment to be provided
 and for their dedication to be met with much gratitude
 and appreciation when they return home, exhausted.

And we pray for medical workers around the world,
 where resources and protective equipment
 are always in short supply, not only now but always.

**May these extraordinary times
 lead to deep and necessary changes in how our world works,
 resulting in a genuine effort to address the profound injustice
 of life expectancy being determined by geography,
 to awaken us all to the reality of how connected we all are
 and to work together to create the community and world
 we all want to be part of.**

Amen.

Thank you for joining together this morning in worship.

There will be a Good Friday service and video next week, as well as Easter Sunday. Jane will send these links out when they are ready.

Let's close this time and sing Ten Thousand Reasons.

CLOSING HYMN: 10,000 Reasons

The sun comes up
 It's a new day dawning
 It's time to sing Your song again
 Whatever may pass
 And whatever lies before me
 Let me be singing
 When the evening comes

*Bless the Lord oh my soul
 Oh my soul
 Worship His Holy name
 Sing like never before*

*Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name*

You're rich in love
And You're slow to anger
Your name is great
And Your heart is kind
For all Your goodness
I will keep on singing
Ten thousand reasons
For my heart to find

And on that day
When my strength is failing
The end draws near
And my time has come
Still my soul will
Sing Your praise unending
Ten thousand years
And then forevermore

BLESSING

And now may the Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Amen.