

## ***Readings – A Palm Sunday Symbols Service***

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship on Palm Sunday

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC

March 25, 2018

Text: Various Gospel Texts

### *Words of Introduction*

This church, like all churches, has always celebrated Palm Sunday, in one way or another. Some churches have services that are simple but reverent. Others are loud and raucous, even beginning with palm parades through nearby streets to relive in some way the extraordinary events of that long ago Sunday. This year, though, is unlike any other because something extraordinary happened yesterday. Youth around the world, led and organized by the youth of a school in Parkland, Florida gathered in the streets of our nation's capital and in every state of this country plus marches around the globe. The March for Our Lives called for an end to gun violence but it was much more than that. This March for Our Lives was a gift of hope and inspiration to the world, recalling the words of the Bible so familiar telling us as long as 3000 years ago that the youth would lead the way into God's future with their visions and dreams, that the children would show us the way forward when we could not see one. Dear Friends, that happened yesterday on the eve of Palm Sunday, and I believe it was no accident. I believe that was God's own divine timing. Youth all around the world reminded us with their bodies

and their words that hope for a better life, a more peaceful life, is alive and well and ready to change everything. This was Jesus' hope as he rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. This is still our hope today. A new world is possible, if we are willing to set aside our differences and work to make it happen.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was, in a real way, a march for justice, a confrontation with the powers that be. Jesus knew this moment we celebrate on Palm Sunday would not ultimately lead him personally to a happy place but he didn't care because it wasn't about him. It was about God's Beloved people being reconciled to God once more. It was about a movement for justice in a society where proforma behaviors and protocols kept poor people poor and allowed suffering to be rampant. Even with the religious institutions of the time, the poor were victimized in a system that forced them to spend money they didn't have to make sacrifices to God in a holy space, a story we will hear shortly.

Palm Sunday is ultimately a remembrance of a long ago march, not so very different from the March for Our Lives yesterday. Important to remember is that the story of Palm Sunday doesn't end when Jesus climbs down off the donkey in the middle of Jerusalem as his palms parade comes to an end. Neither does the story of Palm Sunday begin when Jesus climbs up on the donkey outside the city gates. It begins three years earlier along the banks of the Jordan when Jesus is baptized by

John and begins his full-time work for God after spending time alone with God in the desert. By the time Jesus enters Jerusalem on the back of that donkey, he has been working tirelessly for God for three years. He has devoted his entire life to bringing the people the Good News of the Gospel – that God loves them beyond all reason and that a new way of living in relationship with God is possible.

Dear Friends, what we witnessed yesterday in the March for Our Lives all around the world was living proof that Jesus' long ago procession into Jerusalem was truly the first steps taken in a march that, slowly but surely, would change the world. The hope of new life possible shone through yesterday, clear and bright for all to see. Today we celebrate the first steps of the journey which began with Jesus so long ago. Today we remember that Palm Sunday is the hinge on which the gate to the miracle of Easter morning swings open. Were there no Palm Sunday, there could be no Easter. Jesus' journey ended violently just a few days later but his story continued on bringing us to the empty tomb of Easter morning. And whether those kids at all those marches were Christian or not, they were following in the Palm Sunday footsteps of Jesus whether they knew it or not, whether they care about Jesus or not. They were marching to save us all, just like Jesus did so long ago. They reminded us powerfully that Jesus' story is not in the past. It is alive and well and in our midst every

day. So, I invite you to listen now with new ears to the story of Jesus' last days of life as one of us, human in every way. Hear now this story which is our story as the Easter people of God.

*Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem*  
Reader: *Audrey Walker*

Luke 19:29-40  
Symbol: Palm branch

When Jesus had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, '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. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it."' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.'

Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As 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, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!'

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

*[Walk in to do the reading waving the palm branch and place on the small table in the center of the chancel. Then, when you are finished, place the palm branch on altar and return to your seat.]*

*Jesus Clears the Temple*  
Reader: *Audrey Steinetz*

Matthew 21:12-17  
Symbol: Small wooden stool

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer”; but you are making it a den of robbers.’

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’, they became angry and said to him, ‘Do you hear what these are saying?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?”

He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

*[Place stool on its side somewhere on the altar and return to your seat.]*

*Foreshadowing Jesus’ Death*  
Reader: *Kathy Tarasuk*

Matthew 26:6-13  
Symbol: “Alabaster” jar

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, ‘Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.’ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this

good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.’

*[Place the jar somewhere on the altar and return to your seat.]*

*Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet*

John 13:1-17

Reader: *Adam Tarasuk*

Symbol: Pitcher of water, towel

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater

than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

*[Pour water from pitcher into bowl in baptismal font, lay towel on the side of the font and return to your seat.]*

*Jesus' Last Meal with the Disciples*  
Reader: *Alex & Hartmut Doerwaldt*

Matthew 26:17-29  
Symbol: Bread and cup

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, my time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*[Place the bread plate and the chalice somewhere on the altar and return to your seat.]*

*Jesus Prays for the Disciples*  
Reader: *Eileen Rawnsley*

John 17-1-21  
Symbol: Jesus image

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ...

”I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ...

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

*[Add image to altar and return to your seat.]*

*Jesus Is Betrayed*

Luke 22:39-53



Reader: *Joann Spurley*

Symbol: Silver coins

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” ... When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”

*[Take coins to altar and drop as noisily as possible and return to your seat.]*

*Jesus on Trial*

John 18:12-14; 28-38

Reader: *Erin Blake*

Symbol: Crown of Thorns

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had

advised Jesus' enemies that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid becoming unclean making them unable to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." They replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to them. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?"

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

*[Add crown to altar and return to your seat.]*

*Jesus Is Crucified*

John 19:16-30

Reader: *Dwayne Spurley*

Symbol: Hammer, nail and wood

Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called

The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfill what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

*[Take hammer and drive nail in further with 3 strong hits. Then place on altar and return to your seat.]*

*Jesus Is Buried*  
Reader: *Ed Stratton*

Luke 23:50-56  
Symbol: White shroud

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

*[Add shroud to altar and return to your seat.]*