

Readings – A Palm Sunday Symbols Service

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship on Palm Sunday

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC

March 28, 2021

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 live donkeys and 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 we enter the Palm Sunday Processional, which this morning's service calls to mind, after having spent a year in lock-down because of a pandemic no one really saw coming. Even last year as we celebrated Palm Sunday from the safety of our homes, Peter and I enacting these readings from our kitchen, we had no idea of what the year stretching out in front of us would hold. Our lives have been totally disrupted as the medical community around the world struggled first to understand this awful disease, then how to treat it and how to develop vaccines against it. Every day we witnessed death tolls mounting along with the economic cost and the generalized fear and confusion. We endured when some of our leadership in the government decided to politicize the pandemic for reasons it is still difficult to fathom. Layered on top of all this was the presidential election season itself unprecedented when the clear result of the election was simply denied by those who didn't agree with the outcome.

Dear ones, it has indeed been an awful 12 months in so many ways since the last time we gathered to remember Jesus and his long ago journey into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. Never have we needed Easter joy and hope for new beginnings more than we do this year. Never have we needed to recognize in Palm Sunday and the days to follow in Holy Week our own painful challenges and losses of this past year carried on the back of that donkey along with Jesus. Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day in hope but knowing in his heart of hearts that all would not end as the teeming crowds anticipated that day. He was not a conquering king coming to set everything right. He was a humble rabbi, carried forward by his relationship with the God he called Father, Abba – Daddy. This day, dear ones, we remember and celebrate the courage, the hope, the conviction that God was and is still in charge no matter what appears to be happening in the moment. This day, dear ones, we ride that donkey into Jerusalem along

with Jesus, knowing what fear is, what loss does to us, what happens when we keep moving forward in faith anyway, despite all the reasons not to.

As we listen to the stories recounted by our readers this morning, we carry with us into these stories all that we have endured as individuals, as citizens, as family members, as friends and members of this community of faith in these past 12 months. And, dear ones, just as the readers will place their symbols for each story on the altar as they finish their readings, we are invited in our minds and hearts to place all of our worries and fears and challenges on the altar as well, returning them to God. We are invited to open our hearts and minds to the healing power of God who survives and thrives despite all the forces that for millennia have tried to make God irrelevant, forced to succumb to the will of evil persons. Dear one, that has never happened and it never will. Our God always triumphs over all the forces seeking to convince us that God is irrelevant. We know, after these last 12 months, that nothing could be further from the truth. We know that our God walks with us, guiding us forward come what may, every moment of every day. We know we are not now nor have we ever been left to deal with the vagaries of life alone. God goes with us always – on the back of a donkey, into the valley of the shadow of death and back out of it on a glorious Easter morning filled with hope and the sure and certain knowledge that new life, new beginnings are always possible.

And now, let us begin our journey through Holy Week as I read the first of the readings that will frame our journey...

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Luke 19:29-40

Reader: REV. RUTH

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.’

Jesus Clears the Temple

Matthew 21:12-17

Reader: DAV CRANMER

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.

Foreshadowing Jesus' Death
Reader: MELISSA STRATTON

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.'

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet
Reader: KATHY TARASUK

John 13:1-17
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.

Jesus’ Last Meal with the Disciples

Matthew 26:17-29

Reader: SANDI DAVIS

Symbol: Plate 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."

Jesus Prays for the Disciples

Reader: ED STRATTON

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."

Jesus Is Betrayed

BETHANY FOSTER

Luke 22:39-53

Reader:
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!”

Jesus on Trial

Reader: LYNN MURRAY

John 18:12-14; 28-38

Symbol: Crown of Thorns

So the soldiers, their officer, and the religious 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. 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 these?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “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?”

Jesus Is Crucified

John 19:16-30

Reader: GARY DAVIS

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.

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.

Jesus Is Buried

Luke 23:50-56

Reader: REV. RUTH

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 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.

*PLEASE TURN TO THE LAST PAGE TO SEE THE ALTAR WITH ALL
THE SYMBOLS UPON IT.*



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