



Palm Sunday Devotion

April 5, 2020

*Find a quiet place by yourself or
with another and come to God.*

BLESSING THE PALMS (hold your palm cross in your hands as you say this prayer)

We praise you, O God, for redeeming the world through our Savior Jesus Christ. Today he entered the holy city in triumph and was proclaimed messiah and king by those who spread garments and branches along his way. Bless these branches and all who carry them as we are brought together as one body of faith. Grant all grace to follow our Lord in the way of the cross, so that, joined to his death and resurrection, we enter into life with you; through the same Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Though we have known hardship and pain,
though life has not always turned out as we had hoped,
we lift up our voice and say:

God's steadfast love endures forever!

Though life becomes more complex,
the deepest questions remain unanswered,
and the mystery of faith deepens,
we lift up our voice and say:

God's steadfast love endures forever!

And though the pain of the world
often seems more than we can bear or address,
we will stand firm in our faith and say:

God's steadfast love endures forever!

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you; righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

As the people spread their coats palm branches on the ground to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem, so we welcome him into our lives this morning. King of Glory, King of Peace, Servant King, reign in our hearts and lives this day and all days, that we might praise your holy name. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Amen.

CALL OF CONFESSION

In these days, when we have more time to be worried and fearful, God longs for us to sit by the still waters of love. But our isolation confuses us, our loneliness heightens our doubts, our doubts seem to lessen our ability to be children of God. Let us bring our prayers to the One who will restore us with goodness and mercy.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess O God that we are broken. We are not together physically. We are struggling and suffering in this world, in this time of isolation.

However, we confess, O God, that you are our healer.

You are the one who unites, who binds us together.

We confess that we feel lost, in an unfamiliar time, with an unknown future.

But we also confess, O God, that we have an opportunity to learn the needs of our neighbors more clearly, to listen to one another more deeply.

We confess, O God, that at times we are finding more spaces to rest.

We confess that we are also exhausted.

We confess all the ways that we are distressed, ill at ease, where we struggle with the space we are in; we also confess the simple pleasures we have found in activities we have more time for.

In all this weirdness, O God, help us to find you,

to welcome you in our lives,

to know that your reign is not of this world.

Remind us that this will be temporary, but your reign is eternal. In the name of Christ, who knows our isolation, who knows what it is like to struggle to find rest, who knows our needs in this time, we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God's steadfast love endures forever. No matter what you are going through, no matter what difficulties you face, know that you are loved deeply by God. You matter to God. The hairs on your head are accounted for. Know that God's steadfast love will endure beyond what we are going through now. The waters of our baptism remind us that God's steadfast love endures forever because Jesus died for me. Jesus forgives me. Jesus loves me. Jesus is good to me.

FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON Matthew 21:1-11

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.” 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.”

MEDITATION

From a very young age, I learned to sew. Both of my grandmothers were sewers and so was my mother, although, in my mother’s case this was a well-known fact. Every time she made something for me to wear, people would look at me and ask, “Did your mother make that for you?” She tried.

When my own children were of the age when they could take an elective in sewing, I insisted. I felt that everyone should know how to sew on a button, put in a hem and even a zipper. If you could do those things, you were set for life. Evidence of at least one daughter’s success can be found in my office. It’s the pillow I use as back support on my office desk chair. Nineteen years later and it’s still good to go.

When my grandchildren came along, sewing, or mending, became a frequent need. But instead of their mother’s pulling out needle and thread, when I visited, I would find the pair of ripped pants or beloved stuffed animal sitting on the “I’ll get to it” area of the kitchen counter. I knew my daughters had at least one needle and thread because I always left a pair behind after holiday meals when I performed “surgery” on the turkey, sewing up the flap of skin over the neck area that held the stuffing inside. Even so, they didn’t seem to get much other use and so I would always volunteer to take on the task of mending. It got so

my grandchildren would no longer put the damaged goods on the “I’ll get to it” counter. Instead, they just waited for me to visit and I was sent to my assignment.

One Halloween my grandson, Braden, was distressed when his costume ripped while wearing it. Playtime had gotten a little rough. He was very distressed as he hadn’t yet gone trick-or-treating. Since there was an immediate need for repair and I was nowhere around, my daughter volunteered to take on the task. Amazed by this offer, Braden gave her an innocent and skeptical look and said, “No, grandma has to do it. Do you even know how to sew?” (I didn’t say it, he did!)

In Braden’s mind, I was the one, the only one, who had the know-how to take care of what needed fixing. In today’s gospel lesson, we get a similar thought about Jesus. This very familiar story takes place at the very beginning of the last week, or more accurately, the last five days, of Jesus’ life. Jesus had been traveling around the region of Galilee to the north of Jerusalem, performing all sort of miracles and developing relationships through his teachings, some of which were very odd and unexpected. As a result, he had gained considerable notoriety. His reputation has preceded him wherever he went even though, at least in Mark’s gospel, Jesus constantly instructed everyone to not tell anyone about what he had done. But we all know how human nature goes, whenever you say “don’t” that is exactly when it is “done.” Think of children and hot stoves.

With his reputation soaring, Jesus Leaves Galilee and makes his entrance into the capital of the Jewish faith, Jerusalem. Not only was it center of the Chosen People of God, it was an area of Roman concern, mainly because of the zealous resistance to occupation that had theological roots.

If all of this wasn’t bad enough, Jesus set the date for his arrival at the very time when tens of thousands of pilgrims would have been making their way into that holy city in order to observe the most sacred of holidays, Passover. The faithful traveled to the Temple holding thoughts of that first Passover observance, when God’s people were *passed over* by the Angel of Death. This was the last of ten plagues that God inflicted upon the Egyptians in order to persuade Pharaoh to let the Hebrew slaves go free. As commanded in scripture, every 15th day in the month of Nisan or the night of a full moon after the northern vernal equinox, the Jews commemorated God’s saving act when they were not only spared death but were also given liberation, freedom from their slavery bonds.

Liberation. How the Jews longed for liberation from their Roman oppressors. Before the Romans, their oppressors were the Greeks and before the Greeks, it was the Persians, and before the Persians it was the Babylonians, and before them it was the Assyrians. For some 600 years the nation of Israel had known foreign rule. But for the past 200 years there was a heightened expectation that the Messiah – God’s liberator – would come. He would set free God’s people once and for all from the domination of others.

Into this mindset enters Jesus. And how does the crowd respond? They shout, “Hosanna!” This word literally means “Save Now!” Those there on that first Palm Sunday were looking for a savior. They had a very real expectation of what that savior was able to do. His job, his skill, would be to mend the broken and save the day. It had nothing to do with eternal life and everything to do with political insurgence. They wanted their life of *hell* to end and *heaven* to begin and that meant getting Rome out and the next king in the line of David in.

Let’s be honest, this is a very human desire. We all want our hell, whatever that might be, to end and heaven to be ours right here and right now. And why not? Like the Jews who, on their own, were unable to bring about their own deliverance, we also look for a champion, a knight on a white horse. We get in our minds who and what that needs to be. Like Braden who felt that only grandma could fix his wounded toys/clothes/costumes, we have a strong sense of just who and what can fix our broken world.

The Jews longed for a Savior of strength who would ride in on that white horse wielding Excalibur or a magic ring. Recently, due to social isolation, I've been doing some binge watching of TV in the evenings. One of my favorite movies to view at this time is "Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle." For those of you unfamiliar with the story, it's about four teenagers who literally get sucked into a video adventure game. Once in the game, each takes on the persona of one of the video characters. While it takes all five characters working together to "win the game" by defeating the "bad guy" and thus freeing the make-believe realm of Jumanji, the "hero" of the game is clearly, "Dr. Bravestone." Each of the other four characters is assigned a weakness, like eating cake, snake venom or being slow. Dr. Bravestone has no weaknesses. The teenager who is transformed into Dr. Bravestone can be described in real life as a skinny, nerdy kid. In the game, he is transformed having excessive muscles and rugged good looks – played by the actor Dwayne, The Rock, Johnson. The point is, this "hero" has everything desirable and deemed necessary for victory.

Don't we also long for such a hero, a Savior, one who has everything we deem desirable and necessary for victory? We're not so unlike the characters in Jumanji and the ancient Israelites. Don't we also long for a God who is strong, someone who will come in to whatever challenging or dire situation we face like a knight astride a horse to save the day? Particularly now, with fear coursing across our country, with all but the basic necessities, including churches, closed – honestly, who could have imagined this even a few months ago?! – and health professionals and civic leaders nearly overwhelmed by the challenges. As I write this, the most recent models released suggest that well more than 200,000 people could die from this virus... and that's if we get even more serious about social distancing than many communities are still resisting.

Would we, I wonder, have reacted any differently than the crowds who hailed Jesus' entrance as the one who would rescue them? They wanted Jesus to fix it as only they felt he could, in the way that he could. Based on what they had seen and heard, which was certainly influenced by their preconceived notions of who they thought he would be and do, that crowd shouted, "Hosanna!" Save NOW! Not weeks from now. Not 2,000+ years from now. NOW. We want the Romans out now. We want the COVID-19 virus eradicated, now. We want to go back to work, now. We want the cancer gone, now. We want the addiction stopped, now. We want the fighting stopped, now. We want racism stopped, now. We want what we want, now. Is it any wonder God often gets equated with Santa Claus? Santa comes riding in one night on a sleigh filled with all that will delight us, giving us our hearts desire and in the morning, all is ours, now.

Jesus knew full well that this was the desire of the crowd. It wasn't the first time others tried to set him up as a king. In John 6:15, Jesus had finished healing the sick and then fed over 5,000 people using only five loaves of bread and two sardines. The crowd was so taken by this demonstration of power that they tried to grab hold of him, by force if necessary, and make him king. And Jesus responded by going up a mountain to be by himself until the heat cooled down.

Jesus wasn't a "Dr. Bravestone" type hero. He was a different kind of hero and so he came into that city riding on a donkey. Here's the thing about donkeys, they're small. If Jesus had ridden in on horse, he would have been above the crowd. On a donkey, he was at eye level, with the crowd. What Jesus offers is a Savior who is at eye-level, *with* us. That's where we find our hero, our Savior, with us, Emmanuel. The salvation this Savior brings is salvation that is with us even in the pain and difficulties of life and will get us to the other side. We may go into the darkness of death's tomb, but God promises that the doorway out of that tomb has been opened by our hero/Savior, Jesus.

We all want this pandemic to end – now. We want to be saved – now. But even as we wait for this and whatever other distress or pain or injury we may be experiencing, Jesus is right down here with us, at eye level and will hold us and keep us, bringing light in our darkness.

Hosanna! Save now! Jesus already has, is and will yet save us. On this Palm Sunday, look for Jesus, our Savior who is at eye level, with us even in our hard vulnerable places.

I don't know about you, but I hate watching the news because most of it is about how the number of cases of COVID-19 is dramatically increasing, the amount of medical supplies is dwindling, and unemployment is skyrocketing. But then the news will cover a story about individuals not just coping, but offering hope in the face of despair. You hear about musicians giving free concerts; hotels and restaurants offering their goods and service to healthcare workers; people joining together to sing, applaud, and light candles on their balconies or in their windows; some are making contact by offering greetings and concern over the phone and those who can are making financial contributions to churches and other organizations to keep necessary work happening. These are just a few examples and there are many more of hope, of life. So see, this is where Jesus saves now through the power of the Holy Spirit. He's at the food pantries, the hospital rooms, and the gas stations. Jesus is with us – at eye level. Look. You will see him. Hosanna! – and God said, "Yes, even now."

PRAYER

Hosanna! Save us, O God. Save us from temptation. (add your own prayer)

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Save us from our tempers, our short fuses and bad moods. (add your own prayer)

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Save us from despair. Save us from hopelessness. (add your own prayer)

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Hosanna! Save us, O God. Save us from giving up. (add your own prayer)

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Save us from worry. Save us from fear. (add your own prayer)

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Hosanna! Save us, O God. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed are you, Lord Jesus, who came into our world as one of us, who died as one of us, and who lives again. May we seek your reign on earth as it is in heaven. Hosanna in the Highest! Amen.

BENEDICTION

We do not know what the future will hold for us, but we are assured that whatever happens, God is with us! Follow Jesus boldly to the cross and beyond. For God's promises are good and true. You are beloved. Go in peace. Amen.

If you are able, I commend to you this song, "My Life is in Your Hands":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS6tQYJVO80>

CHILDREN'S LESSON (of whatever age)

Theme: Palm Sunday

Objectives:

- * prepare for Jesus arrival like the first Palm Sunday
- * experience being a king or queen
- * discover what it means to be a follower of King Jesus

You will need:

- * plastic containers or pans or anything that can be made into an “instrument”
- * Green paper or green markers or crayons to color paper green
- * scissors
- * a “crown” – this can be made out of paper or decorate a hat to look “royal”
- * straws or sticks
- * tape or glue

Bible verse:

Matthew 21:1-11 (This can be acted out or use puppets you make out of paper or popsicle sticks)

Jesus and his followers were coming closer to Jerusalem. But first they stopped at Bethphage at the hill called the Mount of Olives. From there Jesus sent two of his followers into the town. ² He said to them, “Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it, you will find a donkey tied there with its colt. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone asks you why you are taking the donkeys, tell him, ‘The Master needs them. He will send them back soon.’” ⁴ This was to make clear the full meaning of what the prophet said:

⁵ “Tell the people of Jerusalem,
‘Your king is coming to you.
He is gentle and riding on a donkey.
He is on the colt of a donkey.’”

⁶ The followers went and did what Jesus told them to do. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus. They laid their coats on the donkeys, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸ Many people spread their coats on the road before Jesus. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ Some of the people were walking ahead of Jesus. Others were walking behind him. All the people were shouting,

“Praise to the Son of David!
God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord!
Praise to God in heaven!”

¹⁰ Then Jesus went into Jerusalem. The city was filled with excitement. The people asked, “Who is this man?”

¹¹ The crowd answered, “This man is Jesus. He is the prophet from the town of Nazareth in Galilee.”

Activities:

1. Noise makers:

- Talk about the noise from the crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem. They shouted and waved and

greeted Jesus loudly.

- What do we do when we get excited about someone important coming to visit?
- Make an instrument to praise Jesus with.

2. Palm Branches:

- In Bible times the palm leaf represented value and luxury. The palm tree was a necessity and produced dates, coconuts, coconut milk, sugar, flour, mats, brooms, baskets, thread, ropes, butter and soap. The people in Jerusalem cut down branches and laid them before Jesus shouting 'Hosanna!'
- Ask, "I wonder what they thought Jesus would do when he came into their town?"
- What are things others do for you whenever you are sad or scared or not feeling well? This is how God helps us through others.
- Make palm branches by tracing your hands on the green paper then cutting them out. Make at least 4. Tape or glue these to either straws or sticks.

3. Jesus is King:

- People in the crowd wanted Jesus to be their king. Think about what would make a good king?
- Take turns being "king" and tells others what you want them to do?
- How did it feel to have to take orders from a "king?"
- Jesus came to be a different kind of king, a king of peace. How do you think Jesus is a good king? How can you be a good follower of a good king?
- Make a king's crown. Have a parade with someone pretending to be King Jesus and others being in the crowd. Use your homemade palm branches and your instruments for the parade.

4. Prayer: "Thank you God for Palm Sunday. Thank you for giving us Jesus. Help us make you king of our lives. Help us turn to you all the time. Help us remember that you are our king. Thank you for loving us so much. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.