

April 5 2020, Palm Sunday

Martin Luther Church Service Outline and Sermon

Welcome¹

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Today, we enter the story of Holy Week, a story defines our faith: Jesus is glorified king and also humiliated servant. Also in the week ahead we will hear of Peter who desires to follow Christ but also finds himself afraid and denying Christ. We will hear of Judas, the disciple who betrays the one he was following and comes to regret his choices. And today, we wave palms in celebration as Christ comes into our midst, even if we are waving them in a different way and without a large crowd gathered.

Thank you to everyone who has joined our weekly online videos in English and the radio devotions offered in German. As people of all faiths around the world prepare to celebrate their holy seasons, we are united in our efforts to continue our faith practices in a way that honours our past while living in the present reality.

The leadership and pastoral team at Martin Luther are thinking of you and praying for you constantly. In the coming week there will be more member calls happening to check in on people, a prayer circle will be starting up using the Zoom platform, we are exploring more ways to support the needs of our neighbourhood. Please keep checking our website, your emails, and this YouTube channel for the latest updates and devotional materials. On YouTube, if you hit the subscribe button just below me, you'll be updated as we post new material throughout this week.

While we are not gathered in body, we are gathered in spirit, and in all of this, we join together to begin the week that stands at the center of the church year, anticipating the completion of God's astounding work.

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.

O God of mercy and might, in the mystery of the passion of your Son you offer your infinite life to the world. Gather us around the cross of Christ, and preserve us until the resurrection, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Psalm 31:9-16

⁹Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble;
my eye is consumed with sorrow, and also my throat and my belly.

¹⁰**For my life is wasted with grief, and my years with sighing;
my strength fails me because of affliction, and my bones are consumed.**

¹¹I am the scorn of all my enemies, a disgrace to my neighbors,
a dismay to my acquaintances;
when they see me in the street they avoid me.

¹ Adapted from Sunday and Seasons introduction to Palm Sunday

¹²Like the dead I am forgotten, out of mind;
I am as useless as a broken pot.

¹³For I have heard the whispering of the crowd; fear is all around;
they put their heads together against me; they plot to take my life.

¹⁴But as for me, I have trusted in you, O Lord.
I have said, "You are my God.

¹⁵My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.

¹⁶Let your face shine up- on your servant;
save me in your steadfast love."

Readings:

Matthew 21:1-17

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

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd 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 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!"

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

¹²Then 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. ¹³He said to them, "It is written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer';
but you are making it a den of robbers."

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵But 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 ¹⁶and 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?'"

¹⁷He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Sermon:

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven.

It sure feels like an odd time to be celebrating. I'm thinking of all the celebrations that usually happen at this time of year, or birthdays that are falling into this season, that are feeling different. Parties cancelled, maybe a cupcake shared over a facetime call, likely not what was planned.

The people who at the time of Jesus' procession, who have gathered in Jerusalem for Passover were expecting a religious celebration, but they probably weren't expecting this. A man, sitting on a donkey, being led into the city by a large crowd that is cheering wildly.

The normal day, the normal life, changed by the announcement that someone important was coming. That this could be the messiah, here and now. And as they shouted their praises and cries, more and more people joined in.

If we think back to three weeks ago, in the middle of our Lenten journey, we probably weren't expecting this. Unable to have our own parade. Unable to partake in the normal acts of day to day life.

I've been reading online over the past week or so that as things have changed, as most of us have come together to support each other, as governmental aid and financial support looks to reach as many people as possible, that as all of this has changed, we can't go back to the old normal. In our old normal, where people were being left behind, mental health and grief were dismissed, work from home arrangements were barely considered, the economic system that couldn't be changed even as we face a global climate crisis – During this time, maybe we heard from leaders or advocates that things needed to change, to save our world, to save each other, but there was little indication that society as a whole could make that change.

And then, in a matter of days, things did change. We were forced to accept a new normal that seemed impossible. And people are reaching out again. Community groups are figuring out what their true strengths are. Churches are reaching out to members more than ever. We are taking time at home to be with our loved ones. Like the people in Jerusalem who planned to recognize Passover but were surprised by calls of Hosanna, called to recognize that something is different, we have also been surprised and called to recognize that something is different.

The cry of the people, Hosanna, seems pretty appropriate for today. It is an Aramaic phrase meaning "help I pray, or save I pray" and over the centuries has come to be understood as a phrase of praise or adoration. And maybe that mixed usage, that mixed meaning, is what we need to hear today. We cry out hosanna – save us I pray. We cry out hosanna – help us I pray. We cry out hosanna – praising the messiah as he enters Jerusalem, entering in glory as he prepares to face his death. We can cry out hosanna as a call to be saved, to be helped, in the midst of knowing what has already been done through Christ.

We cry out hosanna, in recognition of what the crowd has witnessed. The crowd who has accompanied Jesus from Jericho to Jerusalem, the crowd who recognizes their king is walking with them, not a king of the empire, but a king of their salvation. And while we hear in this passage that some people aren't ready to hear this of joy, the religious leaders question what is happening, while they are rejecting the healing that is happening in their midst, the crowds and the children celebrate. The children are reacting. Hosanna! May that be the shout we can all make today, knowing that Jesus' entry into the city marks a new life, a new beginning for the world, a world freed from sin

The leadership team at Martin Luther has been working hard to provide resources for the journey through Holy Week. For the next week we will be dwelling in Matthew's narrative of the passion story. I would encourage you to check out our website, www.martinluther.ca, where you will find the link to our Holy Week Blog post. On this post you will find all our resources, videos, and links that you can use. Monday to Wednesday will have short videos hosted by myself and Vicar Adam that focus on the two great commands of Jesus, Judas' story, and Peter's story. On Maundy Thursday Vicars Caroline and Silke will be hosting an agape meal on zoom. For those that can't join the live dinner there will be an outline for how to do the dinner on your own. On Good Friday we will be posting a contemplative video where we read through the arrest of Jesus to his being laid in the tomb. And on Easter Sunday there will be a video posted that helps us celebrate the good news of Jesus' resurrection. All of this is outlined on the website along with links to other sources to full services for worship at home if that is something you would like to take advantage of.

This is our week to live into this story. To hear it with fresh ears and to spend time reflecting. On each day there will be a call to action, or an activity that you can participate in. For today, as we celebrate palm Sunday, take time to go outside and cut a branch off of one of your trees or bushes and wave it around while saying Hosanna. Tape it to your front door or window so that people walking by can see it. If you don't have a branch available we have a printable palm leaf linked on our Holy Week page of the website. As you do this, take a picture and connect with the church through email or social media – post a picture or video with you and your palms to Facebook or twitter or Instagram. Let's create a virtual palm procession where together we can say Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven.

Prayers:²

In our separate homes but gathered together in the Spirit, we pray for the church, the earth, the world, and all in need, responding to each petition with the words, "**O Lord, save us.**"

O triune God, God of majesty, mercy and might, hear and heed our fervent prayers:
for the church around the world, that the faithful be nourished by your presence in the word;
for pastors and bishops, that they be strengthened for their tasks of ministry;
for all those who are assisting the digital sharing of worship materials;
for guidance in keeping this Holy Week in devout prayer and praise;
O holy God, we pray to you: **O Lord, save us.**

For our distraught world facing the coronavirus;
for countries hardest hit, especially China, Italy, Spain, and the United States;
for those who grieve their dead;
for the sick and their families;

² Prayers adapted from the ELCA at <https://blogs.elca.org/worship/1875/>

for those fearful of an unknown future;
for the millions of unemployed;
for children at home, that they be safe from abuse;
for those who have been led to rely on empty remedies;
for hospitals, in their desperate need for supplies;
for all elected leaders, that they see our crisis rightly and make judgments wisely;
for wisdom in distributing governmental economic aid;
O compassionate God, we pray to you: **O Lord, save us.**

For those whose needs we know, for those whose needs are hidden;
for those with prior illnesses whose treatments are now postponed;
for all who today will die;
for those who are homeless;
for all who are sick; especially Wanda, and her family
O benevolent God, we pray to you: **O Lord, save us.**

With thanks for those who celebrate their birthdays this week, that they can find joy in a world filled with worry. We pray especially for Anita, Natalie, Elfriede, and Emilia.
O God of life, we pray to you: **O Lord, save us.**

And finally, for ourselves:
With thanks for the technology by which we stay connected;
with thanks for enough food;
with thanks for the support of our community of faith;
with thanks for the saints who struggled through life and died in you,
especially those Christian artists whose work has enriched our faith,
we praise your salvation now and unto our end.
O eternal God, we pray to you: **O Lord, save us.**

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray,
trusting in your mercy, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Blessing

May the grace of Christ attend us,
and the love of God surround us,
and the Holy Spirit Keep us,
now and ever.
Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the good news.
Thanks be to God.