

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Special services for Holy Week
elements for Maundy Thursday
tape ministry

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Look! Your king is coming—humble and riding on a donkey.

Hosanna to the Son of David!

Lay your cloaks before him;
spread palms to honor him.

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Raise your voices. Lift your hearts.

Rejoice—our Savior comes!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

PRAYERS OF APPROACH

O Lord Christ,
as you once entered Jerusalem,
enter our hearts afresh this day.

As you once set your face toward death on a cross,
help us this day to walk with you to victory.

As once the children cried “Hosanna” to bless you,
enable us to confess you openly as Lord and Savior.

Grant us your presence by the power of your Spirit,
that our worship and our lives may truly honor you.

As once you came
riding a donkey
proclaiming peace,
humbling yourself and giving yourself for us;
We confess our lack of humility.
As once you entered Jerusalem,
amid the crowd’s shouts of “Hosanna: ‘Save us now!’”
we are all too aware that on Good Friday they shouted “Crucify!”
We confess our praise is often empty.
We sing “Hosanna,” but cry “Crucify.”
As once the crowd laid their palms in front of you,
you took no glory for yourself.

We confess that we want to be accepted and take the easy way.
We do not stay true to your will.
Forgive us, Lord, and help us
to follow in the way of obedience. **Amen.**

Friends, hear this good news
and know that it is good news for you:
We come today – rejoicing;
for God's steadfast love endures forever,
and is greater than all our iniquities.
Through Jesus Christ we have been forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

TIME WITH THE CHILDREN

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Almighty God,
as Jesus entered into the city of Jerusalem,
enter now into our hearts
that we may see what faith and humility
truly looks like. AMEN

Zechariah 9: 9-10

Psalms 118: 1-2 & 19-29

Matthew 21: 1-11

SERMON

‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’

Throughout the Gospels,
in the latter days of Jesus' life
there is this persistent question that hangs in the air:
“Who is Jesus?”

And underpinning this question of identity
is the question of it's implication
What does that mean for us?

This is the question of the Pharisees
and the religious leaders as they seek to trick Jesus;
this is the question of soldiers who go to the garden to arrest Jesus;
this is the question that Pilate asks of Jesus;
and this is the question that is finally answered
by the centurion at the foot of the cross.

But this question of identity is first asked this morning
by a chaotic and puzzled city,
as Jesus approaches the city of Jerusalem
to celebrate the Passover with his disciples;
and the answer of the crowd provides for us a lens
through which to interpret these events.

‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’

The prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures
were people who had been given special revelation
and who were sent to speak to God's people on behalf of the Lord.
And as Jesus enters the city,
through word and deed,
he reveals to the people
-- he reveals to us --
how God's plan will reveal itself
throughout the days of this coming week.

We begin by noting the reason for Jesus journey.
Jesus has come to celebrate the great religious festival of Passover in Jerusalem.
It was a requirement of every Jewish male
that they would make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the festivals.
And so Jesus,
in keeping with the traditions of his faith travels to Jerusalem,
with throngs of other pilgrims.

Some, it seems, recognize him as Jesus of Nazareth.
Perhaps Jesus and his disciples had met with others pilgrims from the North
and travelled together toward Jerusalem.
As these pilgrims travelled they would have sung the Psalms
both as an act of devotion
but also to make the time pass more quickly.

And as they approached the city of Jerusalem
they would have sung a special set of Psalms,
known as the Hallel Psalms.
Our reading from the Psalms for this morning, Psalm 118,
is the last of those Hallel Psalms.

*Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.*

This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

And as you can perhaps tell,
these psalms would be sung responsively
by arriving pilgrims as they entered into the city,
and by those who were already there.

You can imagine then the excitement of this gathering throng,
Jewish people from around the known world
returning to the capital city of their faith,
returning to the very city of God.

But during Jesus time,
the Passover was also a political statement.
The Passover recalls how God had saved God's people
from the captivity of Egypt and the Exodus journey;
it remembers that God had promised a land to God's people,
-- this land – the land of Israel.

A land that in Jesus' time lived under occupation of the Roman Empire.

As a result,

every Passover during Jesus' time
was an open invitation to revolution.

Every Passover reminded the people that the promises of God
still waited to be fulfilled.

Every Passover kindled within the people
a longing for a great messianic King
who would overthrow the Roman authorities
and redeem Israel once more;
to once more bless God's people with freedom.

It is into this nexus of faith and politics that Jesus rides
-- on a donkey.

In ancient times,

it was not common for a person to ride into a city.

The only people who rode into cities
were generals or kings as they lead their victorious army into a city,
either a captured city to show their dominance,
or in the great homecoming parade
in which all the plundered wealth of the vanquished
would be exhibited;
and always at the head of the column
would be the leader astride a great warhorse.

But here, as Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem to reclaim it as the city of God
he comes clip-clopping along on a donkey,
and perhaps not even a mature animal,
but a foal,
his legs dangling on either side,
his feet almost brushing along the ground
as he rides by.

The choice of a donkey
reminds us of the promise of a messianic king
foretold by Zechariah in our other reading;
the one who would put Israel's waiting in Exile
to an end.

But a king who would be known not for his great military power,
but as a king of peace;
as a king who would rule in humility.

In this encounter with the crowds in Jerusalem this morning,
we are given a glimpse of the fact
that the re-establishment of God's kingdom
which Christ came to enact
will not be an exercise of power and might,
but will be accomplished
through the self-emptying love of God.

It is a surprising image,
and yet there is no other way.

As we journey with Jesus through the events of Holy Week
and everything that leads up to his arrest, trial and death upon the cross,
we become aware of that it could happen in no other way.

That the God of love,
would in the end send the divine Son,
to take upon himself the sins of the world
and put them to death on the cross.

To illustrate to us
that the sins of this world are mortal,
but the love of God is immortal.

That in the end,
no display of power
no vanquishing army of heaven's angels,
could save us.

Only love.
And at its heart love sacrifices all for the other.

This question of Jesus' identity
which is introduced this morning
is an important element of the Holy Week journey.

As we move through the encounters which Jesus has
with both his disciples and the religious authorities this week,
let us listen for the unexpected;
for the answers that betray Jesus' humility.

Let us listen for God
speaking once more to God's people;
then and now,
and calling us to new manifestations of God's kingdom,
in us and through us.

Let us listen for Love.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE (MISSION MOMENT SLIDE)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND LORD'S PRAYER

Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

God of our salvation

we thank you our Christ has come!

We praise you

that you would send your son into our world

to grant us a glimpse of your Kingdom

already breaking in all around us.

WE pray, O holy God,
that your glory will fill our sanctuaries
that we might know you are with us;
and fill our hearts
that we might heed your calling.

As the crowds waved branches
and sang hymns of praise
as Jesus entered Jerusalem,
may we declare your love to our world each day,
as we reach out to others
insuring they are okay.

As Jesus came as a humble ruler – riding on a donkey –
and not a conquering King,

we pray that this world may be a place of peace:
peace between peoples,
peace between nations.

In the face of this current crisis facing our world,
we join our voices with leaders around the world
calling for an end to conflict everywhere
that refugees and displaced people may return to their homes.

We Pray for all those who are anxious about what tomorrow may bring,
for the homeless,
and for those who face financial uncertainty.

May they find help and support.

We pray that they may find a network of support to see them through.

We pray for those who must work in difficult circumstances,
for healthcare workers and for those who serve the public.

Protect them and keep them safe.

May they know the contribution they make to our communities
and may they face each day with a renewed sense of purpose and joy.

WE pray for all those who are ill
and those who are awaiting treatments.

Ease their troubled minds

and assure them of your presence in their time of trial.

We pray for those who are recovering from surgery
and those receiving therapies.

May they see progress in their work

and may they be strengthened each and every day.

As we walk these final days with Jesus
may we never forget the price of what was offered up
for our salvation.

And may we be renewed in faith and hope each day,
until at the end your Kingdom comes.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord
who taught us to pray saying:

OUR FATHER >>>

HYMN Ride on, Ride on in majesty (words on the screen)

BENEDICTION