

# Worship-at-home

April 10, 2022

*Palm Sunday*

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## ***God calls us to worship:***

*(Congregational response in bold type)*

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

**Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.**

Jesus humbled himself and became obedient  
to the point of death – even death on a cross.

**Hosanna! Blessed is our King who comes in the name of the Lord!**

Therefore, God has highly exalted him  
and given him the name that is above every name.

**Blessed is Jesus, our Saviour and our friend!**

**Glory to the Creator and the Spirit,  
ever three and ever one!**

**Hymn:** #214 “All glory, laud, and honour”

## ***We offer our prayers:***

Prayer of Praise and Supplication:

Holy God,

Source, Saviour and Spirit of all life,

Holy Three and Holy One,

In you, we confront the mystery of mercy and the courage of compassion.

As we face the Cross on which Christ gave himself,

we confront your willingness to die for us so that we might find new life.

As the Spirit speaks to us through the story of your amazing love,

spilled out in the blood of Christ,

our hearts are moved to praise you.  
Words cannot express our awe,  
the grief and the gratitude stirring within us,  
for all you have given us,  
and for all you will give us through such unspeakable love.  
We fall silent in wonder and praise, Holy God.

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

**Merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed.  
We have not loved you  
with our whole heart and mind and strength;  
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
In your mercy forgive what we have been,  
amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be,  
so that we may delight in your will  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your holy name.  
Amen.**

***God offers the assurance of grace:***

John 3:14-17

Accept the pardon God offers,  
and be at peace with God, with one another, and with your own self.

And give thanks to the Lord,  
for He is good.  
His love endures forever.

***We offer our lives and resources:***

*Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)*

**Hymn:** #216 "Hosanna"

***God speaks to us:***

Readings: Zechariah 9:9-10  
Luke 19:28-40

Sermon:

### The shouting of the stones

1. Today is Palm Sunday. In the church's liturgical year, this is the Sunday during which marks the end of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week – the week that culminates on Good Friday and leads us into Easter Sunday and the ensuing 50-day season of Eastertide.

The usual symbol for Palm Sunday is the palm frond. We wave them, we fold them into crosses. As we're doing so, we sing "Hosanna!" which is a happy cry that both petitions the Lord to save us and praises Him for doing just that.

In these rituals of celebration, we join with the crowds 2,000 years ago who thusly ushered Jesus of Nazareth into the city of Jerusalem mere days before his crucifixion.

The palm frond carries with it a tremendous amount of significance. Much of which is lost for 21<sup>st</sup> century, North American, Gentile Christians. During the so-called "intertestamental time", the 400 years between the close of the O.T. period and the beginning of the N.T. period, palm branches had become a symbol of Jewish revolution and independence.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, Judea, of which Jerusalem was the capital, was under the rule of the Seleucids who were successors to the Greek Alexander the Great. Because of Alexander the Great, much of the Mediterranean world had adopted many Greek cultural and religious practices. While many were accepted, it did cause some concern for the Jewish community as they tried to navigate what was okay for them to adopt and what must be kept separate. What was without question, was that the temple and the temple rituals must remain pure and free from outside influence.

In 169 BCE, upon returning from Egypt and having reclaimed Judea for his own, the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV broke into the Jerusalem temple with his armed entourage. In the apocryphal book, 1<sup>st</sup> Maccabees we read of this desecration:

*[Antiochus] went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the*

*silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. Taking them all, he went into his own land.<sup>1</sup>*

Then, two years later, he returned to Judah and took over Jerusalem, taking captive women, children, and livestock and then fortified the city to use as their own citadel. From there he went on to force that all people of Judah give up their traditional practices and follow his religion – sacrifice to his idols and cease observing the Jewish sabbath, sacrifices, and festivals.

A priestly family whose patriarch was named Mattathias, whose sons included Judas Maccabeus, mounted an armed revolt. This revolt involved three generations of Mattathias' family and, in 141 BCE, they succeeded in reclaiming Jerusalem and the temple. In 1<sup>st</sup> Maccabees 13 we read:

*the Jews entered [the citadel] with praise **and palm branches**, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel. <sup>2</sup>*

Following the victory, a Jewish dynasty ruled until the Roman occupation in 63 BCE. And, every year, the victory was marked with a celebration involving singing and waving palm branches.

One-hundred and seventy-five years later, the Romans now occupied the holy city. As long as they didn't undermine Roman authority or create a stir, the Romans allowed the Jews freedom to live, rule, and worship as they saw fit. However, as the Passover festival was nearing, the city was overflowing with worshipers, pilgrims, and curious onlookers. For the sake of the religious celebrations, it was in the Pharisee's best interest that the Romans be kept calm and there be no rioting. Hearing there was a man on a donkey acting out the arrival of the true king of Jerusalem as described by the prophet Zechariah, and that Jewish citizens were entering the city "with praise and palm branches" would have made them more nervous still!

No wonder the Pharisees asked Jesus to silence his disciples!

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:20-24

<sup>2</sup> 1 Maccabees 13:51

Thus, the palm branch is a powerful symbol. It is a symbol of revolution, of religious freedom, of political independence.

**2.** And, it is completely absent from Luke's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem! Matthew wrote about people cutting branches from nearby trees to spread on the road. Mark mentioned leavy branches beings similarly spread before Jesus as he rode into the city. And John specifically wrote that the people went out to meet Jesus carrying palm branches.

But in Luke's account, there is no mention of palm branches.

Nor is there any mention of people singing "Hosanna!" which, when coupled with the waving palm branches was a cry of revolt. It's a cry for an external power to save us from the regime in which we live.

And it's absent from Luke's account.

It's almost as though he was trying to turn our attention away from human revolution as a means of attaining peace and instead to listen to the shouting of the stones which, even when the people failed to, recognized the divine King who alone commands peace to the nations.

It is not easy, it might even seem audacious, to talk with authority about what makes for peace among the nations at this time in history.

I'm not politically savvy, nor all that knowledgeable of warfare and international diplomacy (although I do have my opinions). I am, however, convinced that there can be no peace on earth if there is not peace in individual souls – in our minds, and in our emotional weavings. When we are not at peace within ourselves, we will continue to attack others to get what we want or think we need – whether materially or emotionally. Perhaps not with bombs and guns, but violence takes many forms. Peace on earth depends on peace in individual souls. And there can be no peace in our souls unless individuals have peace with God.

3. Instead of palm branches and “Hosannas!”, the disciples sang:

*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! **Peace in heaven**, and glory in the highest heaven.*

In Luke 2, when Jesus was *born*, the messengers of *heaven* (angels) announced peace on *earth*. In Luke 19, as Jesus set the stage for his *death*, the citizens of *earth* (disciples) announced peace in *heaven*.

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*Jesus, born and died, is the only King who can mediate peace in heaven (i.e. peace with God), thus peace in souls, thus peace on earth.*

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Despite the unwillingness of the Pharisees and of the ruling elders in the holy city to recognize the time of their visitation from God, Jesus made a bold proclamation.

Elsewhere in the gospels, when people tried to publicize Jesus’ Messiahship, he would often silence them. Scholars call it the “Messianic secret”, where Jesus told people to keep his identity under wraps, for now. One hypothesis for this is that, had the authorities known *how* Jesus would accomplish his mission of salvation, they wouldn’t have killed him. Had they known that the cross was the exact means by which God would redeem His people and install the King of kings, they wouldn’t have crucified Jesus. Jesus knew he had to be crucified, and so, with a few exceptions, he urged those who figured out who he was and how he would do his ministry to keep quiet.

But now, in this carefully scripted drama which Jesus has been orchestrating and now acting in, complete with props: donkey, cloaks, and singing; entering Jerusalem on the far side from the palace, he was making a bold statement that against the powers of Rome, against the Herods, he didn’t silence the crowds. He *is* the king, there *is* now peace in heaven and therefore there *will* someday be peace on earth – not by Rome’s governance, but by our recognizing Jesus as King of kings and surrendering to the governance of God.

4. The time has come to assert against the powers of Rome, and against the powers of sin, death, and the devil, that the kingdom of heaven shall prevail. The gates of Hades cannot.

Even if human beings remain silent, it wouldn't matter: just as stones persist, the kingdom of heaven will prevail.

Even if his own disciples remained silent, it wouldn't matter: just as stones persist, the kingdom of heaven will prevail.

Even if the church remains silent, it wouldn't matter, the very stones, though they may be thrown down and strewn about, yet they will shout out: "The kingdom of heaven will prevail, Christ is its King, and He will command peace to the nations!"

So, we sing "Hosanna, loud hosanna!"

We wave palm branches.

And we boldly proclaim that the peace that lasts and transcends understanding will only come through the One who, in lowly pomp, rode on to die.

And, we pray, for the sake of God's reputation, and the well-being of humanity: "Take, O God, thy power and reign!"

**Hymn:** #218 "Hosanna, loud hosanna"

***We respond in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession***

Lord Jesus Christ,  
You came to us in humility,  
reaching out to all God's little ones with mercy and compassion.  
You ask us to do the same.

So today we pray for all those who find themselves in humble circumstances:  
For the homeless in our community and for refugees wherever they take shelter;  
For the poor and all who find themselves without resources to cope these days;  
For those who live in isolated communities in Canada and around the world,  
lacking access to care, resources and technology others take for granted.  
Strengthen them in your mercy,  
and humble us, lest we forget how much we have to be grateful for.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
hear us as we pray for all those who have been humbled by life's unexpected turns  
during the months of the pandemic:  
We remember before you  
those who face illness, pain or injury; (Pause)  
those who have known death or disaster, fear or failure; (Pause)  
and all who struggle with anxiety and uncertainty. (Pause)  
We pray for victims of crime  
and those who suffer through the misjudgment or mistake of others. (Pause)  
And we pray for those who suffer because of the consequences  
of their own actions and choices. (Pause)

Embrace them in your mercy,  
and humble us, lest we imagine we can live lives untouched by trouble

Lord Jesus Christ,  
hear us as we pray for those who have not learned the lessons of humility yet:  
for those who live carelessly or drive recklessly, endangering themselves and others;  
(Pause)  
for those who abuse the trust and power in their positions,  
betraying those whose interests are in their hands; (Pause)  
And we pray for those who mislead others for gain  
or indulge their fame with no thought for the example they set. (Pause)

Humble them in your mercy,  
And humble us if we are tempted to ignore the consequences of our own actions.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
as we watch you walk to your Cross this week,  
fill us with humble gratitude that you go before us into any challenge or crisis we may  
face.  
Give us courage to stand with others facing injustice or prejudice,  
and give us words to speak out for those at risk at home or abroad,  
for you have given us words to pray for the coming of your kingdom,



your reign of justice, mercy and peace.  
So we pray together:

**The Lord's Prayer**

***God sends us with God's blessing:***

**Hymn:** #217 "Ride on, ride on in majesty"

**Blessing:**