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Sunday, April 5, 2020
Palm Sunday Service and Sermon
For Facebook and Websites

Introduction

I greet you with Blessings today on this Blessed Palm Sunday, April 5th.

My name is Pastor Melinda VanderSys and I serve Our Redeemer Lutheran Church and First Presbyterian Church in Newberry. I am also the Administrative Interim Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church in Sault Ste. Marie.

Each Sunday I to bring you a brief service and meditation based on the Word of God.

We typically would have been given a palm branch to wave during our service today. Since we are not able to gather in person, I invite you to go outside and see if you can find a small branch of any tree lying in your yard. Wave it as we join in our service today – or afterwards, because of timing. Let us begin with joy!

Greeting

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

Hosanna in the highest!

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

Sovereign God, You have established Your rule in the human heart through the servanthood of Jesus Christ. By Your Spirit, keep us in the joyful procession of those who with their tongues confess Jesus as Lord and with their lives praise Him as Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen. (Prayer of the Day, Palm Sunday © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Readings and Psalm

- **Isaiah 50:4-9a** *The servant of the Lord submits to suffering*
- **Psalm 31:9-16** *Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. (Ps. 31:5)*
- **Philippians 2:5-11** *Humbled to the point of death on a cross*
- **Matthew 21:1-11** *Jesus' Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem*

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 21:1-11 NRSV

(<https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#texts>)

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.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on this Palm Sunday. Amen.

I remember when we would fill the churches on Palm Sunday. Everyone was glad the weeks of Lenten gloom were almost over. The congregation would sing loudly with joy, “All Glory, Laud and Honor”. Children would skip down the aisle or parade around the church while everyone waved palm branches. Everyone was so excited!

What a big difference for our Palm Sunday celebration today. We follow the Governor’s Order to “Stay Home, Stay Safe”, and only go out for the essentials. Only those whose job is deemed essential are supposed to leave home to go to work. The rest of the population are indoors, going out only for exercise and the much-needed essentials.

I started walking Scooter, our dog, last week. We have a pretty good-sized back yard at the parsonage. There is plenty of room for Scooter to run, chase a frisbee, and play. But I needed to get some exercise and I figured it was a good time for the dog to do the same.

So, Scooter and I took a brief walk. It was a little later in the evening and we didn’t meet anyone on the street. Most everyone who were planning to walk had probably already done so. The temperature had cooled down so we went as far as the end of the block and turned back toward home.

The next evening, I was watching the news and said to my husband, “I think I’ll take Scooter for another walk.” I’ve found walking is a good way to relieve stress.

Scooter is a pretty smart dog. She’s a Patterdale Terrier. She knew exactly what I said and she ran towards the door.

This walk was different. It was a bit warmer outside. There were several kids the next block down playing basketball in the street. They were shouting and laughing and having fun! I got to the spot where I turned around the night before and decided to walk a little further, turning the corner and heading north up Washington Street.

I got in front of Joy's home and knew I couldn't go inside to visit her, no matter how tempting it was. I stood at the end of the driveway and waved my arm up in the air. I didn't see any of her family come to the window. They didn't notice me.

The driveway has a pretty steep slope to it and there was still quite a bit of snow and ice on it. I had my tennis shoes on – they don't have very good traction. But I decided I'd brave that driveway a bit. I walked about 10 steps up the slope and stopped. I could feel myself slipping a bit in those darn tennis shoes. Holding on to Scooter's leash with one hand, I waved my other arm like I was waving a palm branch on Palm Sunday! Still, no movement at the window. So, I went back down the driveway; Scooter and I finished our walk. We made it all the way around the block that evening.

We met a family of three also walking and I greeted them. I waved at the sheriff department's car that went past. I waved at a few other people – I had no idea who they were. But I still waved.

I do that quite often. I wave at people I don't even know. If I see someone in the store or along the street – obviously before the current Order was placed – I would smile and say hello, whether I knew them or not. I want to greet people – friends, strangers, it doesn't matter - and let them know - that I notice them.

When Jesus walked through Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, He was noticed. He was greeted with shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" He was noticed.

The crowd that gathered spread their cloaks on the road. Palm branches were strewn in front of Jesus and waved as He passed by. He was noticed.

Jesus was noticed, even before He was born. From the prophecy of His existence throughout the Old Testament, to the angel greeting Mary, His mother, Jesus was noticed. From His teachings in the temple as a young boy, to being baptized by John in the Jordan, Jesus was noticed. From the miracles He performed to the healings He has done, Jesus was noticed.

Today is Palm Sunday. Christians around the world would normally be gathering together and singing hymns of praise. We would be waving our palm branches high in the air. Some churches may have even planned to have a person depicted as Jesus riding a donkey past the church. This works just fine until you have a stubborn donkey that doesn't want to cooperate!

We are apart again on an important day in the church year. And yet, we still notice Jesus.

We notice Jesus through those who help by delivering food or medicine or essentials so that others - especially those with compromised immune systems - don't need to leave their homes.

We notice Jesus in the phone calls and mailings that we receive so that we still feel connected to our Sisters and Brothers in Christ in our congregations.

We notice Jesus in the meal programs that help our kids, our families, and our community through the schools and the Feeding America program, through the Department of Health and Human Services, through Community Action, through the LINK and other vital agencies.

We notice Jesus in the many other ways our communities have connected during this pandemic.

This week, the Holiest of weeks in the Christian church year and despite social distancing, we will notice Jesus in many ways.

We will notice Jesus in our devotions we share for Maundy Thursday, awaiting with anticipation for the time when we are able to gather together and share Our Lord's Supper.

We will notice Jesus as we read our Bibles that remind us how He was brought before Pilate and condemned to die, the crowd shouting, "Crucify Him!"

We will notice Jesus as we imagine the pounding of nails, the cries of pain, the wails of His mother during His crucifixion on Good Friday, His final words, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit."

We will notice Jesus' lifeless body lifted down from the cross, wrapped in linen and placed in a tomb.

But the best way we will notice Jesus is through His resurrection. Though there is much unimaginable pain and suffering that Jesus must endure before then, we wait - with anticipation - the joy that follows.

Before we get that far ahead, however, before we get to next Sunday, Easter, and celebrating Christ's resurrection, let us notice Jesus today.

Let us notice Jesus as we gather in our living rooms and around our tables, surrounded by our loved ones, sharing in meal and in God's Word.

Let us notice Jesus in the phone calls we share and the messages we post on social media.

Let us notice Jesus as we support businesses that are vital to our communities, essentials that must remain open.

Let us notice Jesus in the homes we walk by and continue to wave (I got Joy's daughter's attention the next evening 😊).

And, yes, let us notice Jesus in our hearts. Amen.

After my sermon was typed, after it was mailed to my congregations, Joy, beloved servant, walked on. We pray for her family and friends and for all families and friends of those who've walked on during this pandemic and are unable to gather to give comfort to one another. May we lift them up in prayer.

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.** (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *A brief silence.*

God of mercy, on this day when millions of Christians around the world would normally be gathering to celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we find ourselves instead kept inside our homes. Drive away

fear and anger that cause us to turn against one another. Give courage to leaders who seek liberation for the oppressed. Bring peace and hope to those who are in prison and those who face execution.

God of mercy, send Your saving help to all who suffer abuse, insult, discrimination, or contempt. Heal the wounded. Comfort the dying. Bring peace to those suffering chronic or terminal illness or from the coronavirus. Tend to all who cry out for relief, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices at this time....(please lift up in prayer your concerns).

We pray for all who will prepare and lead worship in this Holy Week in ways new to us but in the realization that whatever we do is to the glory and praise of You, and You alone.

According to Your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to You; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (prayers from Palm Sunday, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray...

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen**

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to serve our Lord! **Thanks be to God!**
And with joyful voices, let us shout, **"Hosanna in the highest! Amen!"**