

Prelude:

[Annie Schulz]

Women's Chorus: "Blest Be the King Whose Coming"

*Blest be the King whose coming is in the name of God!
For Him let doors be opened, No hearts against Him barred!
Not robed in royal splendor, In pow'r and pomp, comes He,
But clad as are the poorest, Such His humility.*

*Blest be the King whose coming is in the name of God!
By those who truly listen His voice is truly heard.
Pity the proud and haughty who have not learned to heed
The Christ who is the Promise, Who has atonement made.*

*Blest be the King whose coming is in the name of God!
He only to the humble reveals the face of God.
All pow'r is His, all glory! All things are in His hand,
All ages and all peoples, till time itself shall end!*

Gathering Thoughts:

[Beth Woelk]

Welcome to our service for March 28th, the sixth Sunday in Lent. Today on Palm Sunday we enter Holy Week together and continue our Worship Series entitled "Wilderness Calls to Deep Faith". Blessings to you as you listen or read from home on this early Spring day. In today's recording you will hear the voices of our wonderful Women's Chorus and the musical selections of Annie Schulz our Music Coordinator. We look forward to Pastor Doug Schulz's reflection entitled "The Passionate Path." We continue to give thanks for the ability to record our services and provide them online for Sundays that we do not gather together in person. Thank you to Jan Steven who posts them on our website each week and to Ted Kopp who is at the sound and recording booth today. We invite you to quiet your mind, open your heart and join us in this time of worship.

Call to Worship and Prayer:

Hosanna!

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

Blessed are we, for we have been created by that same God.

Blessed is the sound of our voices, lifted up in praise.

Blessed are our hearts open to hear and receive your Word.

Blessed are our bodies that move and serve and embody your Love.

Blessed is the Breath that enlivens us, animates us, and sustains us in singing and living our ceaseless praise to you, O God.
Hosanna!

(Adapted from Voices Together #885)

Holy One, as we gather our hearts together this day, we remember the story of the crowd who waved palms and removed their cloaks to prepare the way for Jesus as he entered Jerusalem.

As we come to worship may we lay down our assumptions and defenses so that we may see you for who you truly are - the One who sees and loves us as we truly are. As we come to worship we confess the ways that we have chosen self-protection, avoidance or despair when the road has seemed too difficult or too costly.

And yet you ride in - in surprising humility and grace to show us the way and to empower us to follow you.

As we come to worship may we offer our hosannas as we lay our hearts and lives before you.

Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! 2 Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. 20 This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. 21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. 22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. 23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. 25 Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! 26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. 27 The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. 28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. 29 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Women's Chorus: "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna"

*Hosanna, loud hosanna, the little children sang.
Through pillared court and temple the lovely anthem rang.
To Jesus, who had blessed them, close folded to his breast
The children sang their praises, the simplest and the best.*

*From Olivet they followed' mid an exultant crowd,
the victor palm branch waving, and chanting clear and loud.
The Lord of earth and heaven rode on in lowly state,
nor scored that little children should on his bidding wait.*

*“Hosanna in the highest!” That ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer, the Lord of heav’n our King.
Oh, may we ever praise him with heart and life and voice,
And in his blissful presence eternally rejoice!*

Prayers of the People:

[Doug Schulz]

Written by Rick Morley – A Formal Prayer of Intercession for Palm Sunday
(inspired by Philippians 2: 5-11)

Christ, we pray that you would hear our prayers,
and graft in our minds the same mind that is in you,
that we might be vessels of your humility and grace.
Lord Jesus, you emptied yourself,
trading in the form of God for the form of a slave;
we pray for the Church, and all her people and ministers.
Form us into a Church that empties itself for others, and for you.

Lord Jesus, you were born in human likeness,
and found in human form;
we pray for the whole human family, for the nations of the earth,
and for all who live in the midst of disaster, famine, or terror.

Lord Jesus, even after humbling yourself in your incarnation,
you humbled yourself even to the point of death;
we pray for our nation, our leaders,
and all the people who live within these borders.
Bless us with your humility.

Lord Jesus your humility and your love for us
was so broad and deep, it cost you your life.
We pray for those who we love who have died,
and as you were highly exalted, may they rest with you in glory.

In your exaltation, O Lord,
you were given the name that is above every name;
we pray in your name for those who are poor,

those who are hungry,
and those who are hurting in any way.
Give them your grace.

We also pray, in your name O Lord,
for those who are sick -
give them the gift of healing, strength, and life.

You humbled yourself in the manger,
and you humbled yourself on the cross;
and to you O Lord we bend our knee
with those above and those below,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Women's Chorus: "Jesus is Coming/Holy Lord"

*Jesus is coming. Pave the way with branches.
Jesus is coming. Hosanna.
Jesus is coming. Pave the way with branches.
Jesus is coming. Hosanna.*

*Hosanna, Jesus is coming.
Hosanna to the Prince of Peace.
Hosanna, Jesus is coming.
Hosanna to the Prince of Peace.*

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of pow'r and might,
heaven and earth of your glory are full;
hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!*

*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,
blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of pow'r and might,
Heaven and earth of your glory are full;
hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!*

Scripture:**Mark 11:1-11****[Doug Schulz]**

1 When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 2 and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. 3 If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?' just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.' " 4 They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5 some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6 They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 9 Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" 11 Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Reflection:**“The Passionate Path”****[Doug Schulz]**

It's Palm Sunday. We read about Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt as people cheer loudly. What? Riding on an awkward, humble small beast of burden, an ordinary poor labourer's animal! Yet Jesus is treated like a military or political hero coming home to crowds that proclaim adoration and loyalty?! What is this?

On Palm Sunday, I'm reminded of the traditional worship song "Ride On, King Jesus!" "Ride on, King Jesus! Ride on! No one is gonna hinder me." Sometimes the lyrics are expressed as "Ride on, King Jesus! Ride on! No one is gonna hinder thee!" where "me" is changed to "thee" as is done by popular Canadian Christian singer Steve Bell. Of course, this song emphasizes that Jesus is going to be victorious, ultimately, over all kinds of injustice and evil in the world. Yes, Jesus is the ultimate ruler over all powers on the earth. All eyes on this Holy Rider, now! This One will someday deliver all people on our planet from its wicked and woeful ways!

The song I'm referencing originates in the spirituals sung by slaves at their toils and pains under a hot sun in south-eastern USA. The repetitious phrases and lilting beat could keep a human creature in the rhythm of doing hard work unendingly, hopefully without hearing a stinging tongue of rebuke or feeling the skin-splitting lash of a whip. The slave's version of the song was, indeed, "Ride on, King Jesus! Ride on! No one is gonna hinder me." There is a personal cry here for God's help to get through the many horrors of captivity and servitude. Some of us in this room had

relatives who suffered – and many died - in the slave-labour gulag prison camps of Joseph Stalin last century. What songs did they sing?

When suffering gets personal, our cry for help gets passionate. Think of another powerful spiritual song in a very personal, heart-wrenching way by those trapped in American slavery: “Were you there when they crucified MY Lord?” The late Black civil rights leader and theologian Howard Thurman wrote, “[Jesus] suffered, He died, but not alone—[the slaves] were there with Him. They knew what He suffered; it was a cry of the heart that found a response and an echo in their own woes.”

Our theme this season has been “Wilderness calls to deep faith.” And certainly the voice of Blacks in North American history and still today in contemporary society bears witness to the truth of this claim. In the wilderness we are left with the choice to wither and die, or to cry out from the deepest places of our being toward the highest hope we can strive to reach for by faith. And, of course, by our actions in moving forward as faith leads the way. As Jesus “rides on”!

So, on Palm Sunday, as we join Jesus in his entrance to Jerusalem, knowing that just a few days later he will be crucified just outside the city walls, we realize we are on a “passionate path” indeed. We approach Easter weekend with our hearts full of awareness of this world’s ‘wilderness’ struggles and pains. And, if we are honest, we confess there are parts of our own personal journey that cry out to God for help, for healing, for something refreshing, something that can originate only as a blessing from “One who comes in the name of the Lord!”

What is it that you and I are wishing to have from God today? Contemporary English priest and poet Malcolm Guite [pr. ‘gate’], in his poem “Palm Sunday”, says:

Now to the gate of my Jerusalem,
The seething holy city of my heart,
The saviour comes. But will I welcome him?
Oh crowds of easy feelings make a start;
They raise their hands, get caught up in the singing,
And think the battle won. Too soon they’ll find
The challenge, the reversal he is bringing
Changes their tune. I know what lies behind
The surface flourish that so quickly fades;
Self-interest, and fearful guardedness,
The hardness of the heart... Jesus come
Break my resistance and make me your home.

Malcolm Guite reminds us that it is easy to be religious, claiming that we welcome God. But what if God challenges self-interest and self-protectiveness? What if God asks me to soften my heart and set aside any resistance?

I know that many of us come to Palm Sunday and Easter Week this year with cries for God's help – for the world to get past the pandemic, and for crises or concerns in our personal life related to health and to relationships. Let's face it, it's just plain human to have these kinds of burdens and trials in our lives. No matter what is going on, there is a welcome today to say "Ride on, Jesus! Come show me what I need to know, what I need to believe, what I need to change, what I am able to do to welcome you for this day's help, and for a richer way to live the rest of my life."

But let's remember something. It is so easy to think of how close to Easter we are coming. And, though I'll cringe at the dark terror of Jesus' death on Good Friday, I already treasure the relief I'll feel in the Easter morning celebration. Yes, next weekend we will welcome the sense of forgiveness of sin and promise of eternal life that we confess is established by Jesus through the Easter story. We'll ponder how amazing it is that God's grace covers sinfulness, that God's goodness cleanses from guilt and shame... as many of the old gospel songs proclaim.

But it strikes me that when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt on Palm Sunday, the story teaches that Jesus is not interested only that I find some sort of psychological relief from my awareness of personal shortcomings. Or release from spiritual guilt where and when I pridefully deny I have any need of grace. Jesus rides the passionate path toward his own awful death because he cares for my weakness, your weakness, our brokenness, and anyone else's. Jesus rides into our innocent core Self with a capital "S" that too often is self-absorbed and self-protective, and Jesus invites us within our identity as a being that God loves to identify with all the weak and broken people around us wherever they are, because God loves us all the same. Jerusalem, the city into which Jesus rides, is called "God's peace" or "God's place of wholeness". Jesus asks me to honour his Easter salvation story as belonging to the rescue, yes, of my own soul from sin in all its forms. But this includes the sin of forgetting that awareness of my personal 'salvation' is just the beginning of the Good News Story!

Yes, Easter is the ultimate story of hope. Resurrection is coming, indeed! But on Palm Sunday, we are invited to remember that a whole crowd of people celebrated that day that their King had come. They expressed as an oppressed community their passion to find a savior, one who would rescue them with God's help from the imperial Roman overlords that dominated their lives and made them slaves to fear of harm all the time. So, believing the time for deliverance is at hand, they throw

branches and their very own clothes onto the passionate path of their expectation of change, of justice, of peace. Personal salvation. And hope for the nation. The world!

Now, let's go back to the slaves' story, the slaves' song. Believing in your goodness and grace, O Lord Jesus... no one can hinder me! My story of redemption from slavery is tied into the story of God's full salvation when injustice will end and a new world begins. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. No one can hinder the purposes of God as revealed in Jesus, and as believed in by those who call on that name! This is the story of these days beginning with Palm Sunday and on toward Easter morning, and the Easter reality day by day always.

What good news it is to know our sins are forgiven, thanks to Jesus who proves that the dark forces, the dark side, cannot dominate forever. And how good it is to know that life in Jesus holds a promise of life eternal! We can only imagine what that means. But we can strive to live in hope of it. And, we can endeavour to live also in hope of a better world now. Therefore, we pray with humility about, and do what we can in terms of exercising responsibility with, those challenges of health and relationships I mentioned earlier.

Finally, we can take the passionate path with Jesus as we continue to do what we have been doing as a congregation, namely, helping oppressed people in this world. For example, helping refugees so that innocent people whose lives have been destroyed by war can find hope again. Earlier this month I met with our Mennonite Central Committee Refugee Coordinator, Moses Moini, to report various aspects of my involvement with Bridge of Hope and other refugee sponsorships. I asked Moses about his own people back in Africa, in South Sudan, many of whom were forced out of their homes in 2017 into refugee camps. His own mother was displaced that way, and died within a few months of being forced into the refugee shelter. Moses shared that he has relatives stuck in those camps. I said surely there must be something he could do to help them, given his work as a refugee resettlement agent with MCC. Moses has personally adopted an orphaned niece and nephew, but he said it would be seen as a 'conflict of interest' if he promoted sponsorships for his relatives.

Let that sink in... It's a tough situation, and ironic, in my view, if not even unjust. MCC, which began 101 years ago as an agency to help the Russian relatives of the Mennonite founders, now cannot let an African man help his relatives caught in a modern war. There's something wrong with this picture. Moses was not trying to be political, he was just sharing his passion to help change the future - maybe by saving the lives - of some of his own family. He did not ask me to share this with you today. He just said, "Thanks for your prayers for my people." I plan to follow up.

Perhaps there is something we as a congregation can do for some Sudanese people, the way we plan to help Ethiopians.

Palm Sunday. We have been on the Lenten journey until now. We have said that "Wilderness calls to deep faith." The song says, "Ride on, King Jesus!" There is nothing that will hinder the pathway to the cross now. The passionate path to the place where Jesus shows the world what the love of God really means. What will it mean for you and me this year? Somewhere in this story of majesty mixed with mortal pain, may we renew our vision to walk with Jesus with hope and joy again and again.

Hymn of Response: "Ride On, Ride On in Majesty"

*Ride on, ride on in majesty, as all the crowds "Hosanna!" cry,
through waving branches slowly ride, O Savior, to be crucified.*

*Ride on, ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die.
O Christ, your triumph now begin with captured death and conquered sin!*

*Ride on, ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die.
Bow your meek head to mortal pain, then take, O God, your pow'r and reign.*

Benediction:

[Beth Woelk]

From where we are to where you need us:

Jesus, now lead on.

From the familiarity of what we know to the wonder of what you will reveal:

Jesus, now lead on.

To transform the fabric of this world until it resembles the shape of your kingdom:

Jesus, now lead on.

Because good things have been prepared for those who love God:

Jesus, now lead on.

(Voices Together #1050)

Sending Hymn: "To My Precious Lord"

*To my precious Lord I bring my flask of fragrant oil;
Kneeling down, I kiss his feet, anoint them with the oil.*

*Jesus, who for my sake walked the road to Calvary,
With each step has marked the imprint of his love for me.*

*Jesus, who for my sake had his feet nailed to the cross,
With his blood has washed and healed me, paid the heavy cost.*