

EAST PLAINS UNITED CHURCH

For the Week of April 5, 2020

Palm/Passion Sunday

*We are with each other even when we aren't able to be gathered together.
We are not alone.*

Prepare a quiet place in your home to spend a few minutes in prayer and reflection each day. Consider turning on some quiet music. On a computer browser, search for "music for Holy Week," e.g. multiple wonderful links here: <https://thefederalist.com/2015/04/02/try-some-of-the-worlds-best-music-for-holy-week/>

Light a Candle or use an electric candle if flames are not allowed where you live. Here is how our chancel looks with all our Lent candles lit:



On Palm Sunday, April 5, we share together Holy Communion in our at-home worship.

Before the time of the service, prepare some bread, a slice or a small loaf or even an English muffin. In some parts of the world tortilla, rice cake, cassava are used as this element, which is defined not as a wheat product but as the most common food of the people. Let it be something you alone or you with others in your house may break and share. Prepare a cup or cups of juice—perhaps grape or cranberry—or wine, with or without alcohol.

Set these elements in the living room or kitchen where you will experience worship this week. Consider putting them on a lovely cloth or fabric that reminds you of a special time or a person deeply connected with you in the communion of saints. You might place a flower or plant, or the photograph of someone you wish to bring into the circle of faith, beside the bread and the cup. Thank you for your preparation.

Consider, as we begin:

We are one or several in our homes,
And we are many, part of a socially distanced faith community.
One in the Spirit, even while apart from each other,
We are one in the kin-dom of God, one in the body of Christ.

Prayer

Palm Sunday's Hosannas take on new meaning for us this year, God of our salvation. Hosanna, "save us!" Save us from our fears and anxieties in this time of COVID19. We enter a time of worship, seeking hope, comfort, and strength for our weary souls! We come, as followers of Jesus, the one whose ministry of good news led him to a cross at the end of this Holy Week. We walk with him with new realization of the uncertainty of what lies ahead for us. Amen

Scripture Readings for Palm/Passion Sunday

It is a challenge to fit all these readings into one worship service. In our unusual situation this year, consider spreading the readings over this week.

Prayer before Scripture: As we read familiar words this day, startle us, O God, with their freshness. Open our hearts to receive your blessing. Amen

Liturgy of the Palms

Matthew 21:1-11	Jesus enters Jerusalem.
Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29	Psalms for Palm Sunday: The stone the builders rejected

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a	The suffering servant struck and insulted
Psalms 31:9-16	My times are in your hands.
Philippians 2:5-11	Let the same mind be in you as was in Jesus.
Matthew 26:14-27:66 or Matthew 27:11-54	The passion of Jesus

Reflect

What's it like to experience a life-changing (or world-changing) event? That is what the people around Jesus experienced in that first Holy Week. We would not be Christians today, followers of Jesus, without the events of that week. Perhaps we are experiencing another world-changing event in the experience of this COVID19 pandemic. Life as we know it, at least for the immediate future, has changed drastically. Will it ever return to "normal"? Or will a "new normal" emerge? How will that change our world and our lives? Our faith community? Might this be a "Turning Point" (google the term!) for all of creation? What might that look like? Be creative in what you imagine and hope for!

Rev. Barb's Palm/Passion Sunday message is at the end of this worship bulletin.

Invitation to the Offering

Before we were told to stay home, we had planned to bring our offerings forward, rather than passing plates with germs on them. (See the photo on pg. 1) In these times of COVID19 isolation, let's be creative about how we bring our financial gifts for the ministries of our faith community, which continue via internet, phone, and mail and (in some cases) take more effort than usual.

A number of people are on PAR, Pre-authorized Remittance from their bank accounts. For information on PAR, contact the church office. Many others are mailing or dropping off cheques in the church mailbox. If you do that, consider saving yourself repeated effort by writing post-dated cheques for the next several months. We don't encourage online giving, because of the (small) fees that are deducted, but Canada Helps is a way to donate easily online, if you prefer, at <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/east-plains-united-church/>.

Your gifts are making good things happen. Thank you!

Invitation to Communion

For Holy Communion this morning, I invite you to lend Christ your table. On the first day of Holy Week long ago, people throughout Judea arrived at the dusty gates of Jerusalem, primed with "Hosanna" in their hearts and Jesus asked to borrow a donkey.

On the Thursday that followed, tradition tells us Jesus rented or was given John Mark's mother's Upper Room to celebrate the Passover with the disciples.

On the afternoon of the resurrection, Jesus was invited into a house in Emmaus and used the bread of that hospitality to break and bless.

Lend Christ your table, your bread, your cup and your heart, for, as the disciples told the person who loaned the donkey, "The Lord has need of it."

Prayer of Consecration

Though this church community is scattered, In many kitchens, and living rooms, rest your hands lightly upon these elements which we set aside today to be a sacrament. Let us ask God's blessing upon them.

Gentle Redeemer, there is no lockdown on your blessing and no quarantine on grace.

Send your Spirit of life and love, power and blessing upon every table where your children shelter in place, that this Bread may be broken and gathered in love and this Cup poured out to give hope to all.

Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live in you.

Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you. Amen

Words of Remembering

We remember that Paul the apostle wrote letters to congregations throughout places we now call Greece, Turkey and Macedonia, and they were the first "remote" worship resources. Our worship today has a long heritage.

The Communion words sent to the church at Corinth were these:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed
took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Concern (silently or together with those in your home)

Prayer of Jesus (The Lord's Prayer)

Sharing of the Elements (Read responsively if there is more than one person)

Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.

We are one in Christ in the bread we share. (Eat the bread.)

Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

We are one in Christ in the cup we share. (Drink from the cup.)

Prayer after Communion

Let us pray in thanksgiving for this meal of grace, rejoicing that,
by the very method of our worship, we have embodied the truth that Christ's love
is not limited by buildings made with human hands,
nor contained in human ceremonies, but blows as free as the Spirit in all places.

Spirit of Christ, you have blessed our tables and our lives.

**May the eating of this Bread give us courage to speak faith and act love,
not only in church sanctuaries, but in your precious world,**

and may the drinking of this Cup renew our hope even in the midst of pandemic.

Wrap your hopeful presence around all

whose bodies, spirits and hearts need healing,

and let us become your compassion and safe refuge. Amen

Communion for Palm Sunday was adapted from one written by the Rev. Maren C. Tirabassi.

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United Church of Christ. https://www.ucc.org/online_communion_palm_sunday_april_5_tirabassi

To talk with Rev. Barb or ask for prayers, please phone her cell: **416-540-8498** or email: **revbarbarafullerton@gmail.com**.

If there is something with which we can help (deliver food, medication, etc.), please leave a message at the church: 905-634-5562, **Line #2** or email: office@eastplainsunitedchurch.com.

What would you like to see in this space each week?

What will you offer to do to reach out to others during this time of social isolation?

Consider phoning two people you know who are NOT connected with East Plains United Church and ask them how they are doing and how you can support them during this time.

Please send your feedback on these weekly messages and thoughts about how we can stay connected during this time.

Maundy Thursday at-home service

Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson

<https://worshipwords.co.uk/maundy-thursday-at-home-service-complete-thandiwe-dale-ferguson/>



Since we were planning to worship with West Plains UC on Good Friday this year, I had not been working on a Good Friday service or sermon. However, I invite you to read this reflection by a Canadian Lutheran pastor friend, with whose theology I resonate:

GOOD FRIDAY. Searching beyond the talk of sacrifice to see the Good News.

<https://pastordawn.com/2013/03/25/good-friday-searching-beyond-the-talk-of-sacrifice-to-see-the-good-news/>

Blessings to each and every one of you as we enter this sober and Holy Week.
Rev. Barb

Palm/Passion Sunday—5 April 2020
A reflection for reading (and perhaps discussing) at home
during the COVID19 pandemic Holy Week
Prepared by Rev. Barbara Fullerton for East Plains UC

On Palm Sunday, the roads were filled with pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. As streams of people crowded together on their way to the city, Jesus' followers were only one group among many. What we hear in the Liturgy of the Palms is a sense of the excitement of that day, and the hope that things can be different.

While the gospel accounts are united in telling us Jesus comes in a kind of procession, there are various accounts. Matthew and Mark speak of branches being cut and laid down along with garments, which is the reason we call this Palm Sunday. Luke doesn't mention palm branches at all.

I was brought up with a picture of Jesus parading, like a Santa Claus parade, with crowds standing at the side of the street cheering, and possibly joining in to follow the end of the parade. More likely, his followers were part of a larger crowd entering the city—noisy, happy, like spring breakers on the way to a holiday, a fond memory for us now in pandemic times

Hailing Jesus with Hosannas, which means, "Save us," gave it an element much like the "Fridays for Future" student protest marches about the climate crisis last year. The throngs in Jerusalem were as massive as modern-day marches or demonstrations.

An educated guess is that the population of Jerusalem was about 50,000 at the time. The High Priest was instructed to take a **census** of the Passover crowds by counting the number of sacrifices offered at the temple that week. He reported 1,200,000—so that would be 1.2 million sacrifices for that many families, not individuals! So, if we just count 2-parent families, not even counting the children, that is about 2.5 mill people, almost the size of Toronto, a 50-fold increase in population in Jerusalem for that week.

No wonder Jesus saw it as an opportunity to spread his message of love and the Kin-dom of God!

And no wonder Pilate stepped up security. Jesus was not the only leader on his way to Jerusalem. Likely in the crowd were other rabbis, like Jesus, and their followers as well. And of course, there were ordinary people like you and me, going to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, going to a festival,

going to celebrate. In these days of social distancing, it seems like a distant memory to be part of something like that!

Pontius Pilate also headed a procession that day. He likely rode a war horse, followed by ranks and ranks of Roman soldiers, their sheathed swords a visible reminder that Rome's rule, like all empires, was founded on violence.

After the commotion and confusion, the palm waving and shouting of hosannas on Palm Sunday, we soon hear a second theme emerging in the story of Jesus' last week. What we call the Passion story is also often read on this day, where we see anger and hatred coming to a quickly-called trial that led to Jesus' suffering and death.

As events unfolded, one of Jesus' own followers plotted with temple authorities to capture Jesus during his time of private prayer on the Mount of Olives after celebrating the Passover meal with his friends. Jesus had sparked such anger among the temple authorities, exposing their alliance with the Romans, that they set the stage to ensure he was put to death. They were not allowed to kill anyone themselves, because of their "Thou shall not kill" commandment. So they found a way to arrange for the Romans to do it instead.

Our faith tells us that Jesus was more than just another statistic of Roman crucifixion, however.

A long-time friend, Rev. Fran Ota, suggests: *As Jesus rides through our Palm Sunday parade, can we hear him telling us he has **not** come as a mighty Messiah to overpower the powers that be? [Instead] he meets us in the very fragility of being human, at the depth of our human suffering, showing us how to walk through that suffering to a place of peace in which celebration does not end, and freedom is real, for everyone.ⁱ*

It is ironic that in this week that we remember the activities of Jesus' last week, taking him toward the cross, we ourselves are living in a time of pandemic which is approaching its peak. We are living our own Holy Week of sorts, feeling fragile, feeling anxious about what is to come and whether we or someone we love may fall seriously ill or even die.

The suffering and death of Jesus, resulting from his commitment to his ministry of love and compassion, feel very real this year. And just as real is that God will be with us through whatever is to come.

How will we take that word of hope to those people who only know this side of the cross, that it means death? What will **we** do with this week after the parades of Palm Sunday and the march to the cross are over?

A colleague posted in one of our clergy online exchanges last year: “The Palm Sunday story calls us into an in-between space—into the fraught space between freedom and captivity, companionship and betrayal, outrageous joy and unspeakable sorrow, life and death. Somewhere between Bethany and Jerusalem a parade [forms] that also, in [hindsight], looks like a funeral cortège. We know what is coming, but we are not there yet. We are in between and we are asked to sing. It is uncomfortable, singing even as we weep. But it is the way of discipleship.”ⁱⁱ

Even reading that quote makes me want to weep. Here is another one, perhaps more sobering, by poetic preacher Thom Shuman:

“As Jesus passes by in the Palm Parade and recedes in the distance,
we gather up all that we offered in the joy of the celebration,
and we take them to the money changers,
trading peace for anger and fear,
hope for betrayal,
shouts for jeers,
cloaks for grave cloths,

So we can offer them in the coming days.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Holy Week is strangely real this year, as we remain in our homes, not allowed to gather for the traditional worship experiences of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. It may even feel for us much like it felt for the disciples after Jesus’ crucifixion, as they closed themselves into the upper room, isolated.

Living in this time of COVID19 is a Good Friday experience, a Holy Saturday experience. We wait, wondering what is coming, and whether there will again be a day when life feels new again. It won’t ever be the same. But we live in hope that our lives will be whole again and that we will be out in our world and able to be together in our faith community.

All Earth awaits a Resurrection.

May it be so.

ⁱ From Fran Ota’s Palm Sun sermon, posted on *Midrash* in April 2019.

ⁱⁱ “Part of me thinks Palm Sunday worship is all too much—too loud, too celebratory,” by Ron Adams, March 12, 2019

ⁱⁱⁱ Inspired by Thom Shuman poem, *passion's alms* (Luke 19:28-40), © 2019