

Palm Sunday Worship April 5, 2020

Centennial UMC at Ivy

Welcome & Announcements

Ad Council meeting: Monday night at 7pm over Zoom

Holy Week Schedule:

- Worship on Wednesday at 7pm
- Maundy Thursday- live service including communion on YouTube & Facebook at 7pm (won't be made available afterwards)
- BedTime stories-- we'll post Thursday at 6:30pm this week
- Friday prayer vigil: online sign up sheet (link in email and online)
- Youth Easter Sunday Sunrise Service
- Easter Sunday celebration worship at 10:30am
- Celebrate communion live afterwards at 12noon.

Centering quote

Let's prepare our hearts and minds to worship and serve the living God, as I read aloud the centering quote. This quote helps us remember why we come to worship today, on Palm Sunday, which we will reflect more on from the words of Matthew's gospel. May this quote from Sarah Dylan Breuer help us find centeredness as we come to worship this morning:

"It's not that Jesus is uninterested in what happens on earth. Quite the opposite is true. Jesus didn't come to tell us to give up on the earth, any more than he came to rule it like Pilate. Jesus came to redeem it... Jesus didn't come to take over Pilate's system; he came to replace it." -Sarah Dylan Breuer

Call to Worship

One: We come to prepare for the holiest of weeks.

All: We will journey through praise, with joy on our lips;

One: We will travel through betrayal and death, cradling hope deep in our hearts.

All: Jesus leads us through this week, and we will follow.

One: For Christ is the life we long for; He is the Word who sustains us.

All: We wave palm branches in anticipation, we lay our love before him to cushion his walk.

One: Setting aside all power, glory, and might, he enters Jerusalem:

All: Modeling humility and gentleness for us all.

One: We will praise the God who loves us and face with courage our path of faith.

All: Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is the One who brings us the kingdom of God!

Prayer Concerns

For the family of Ruth Marks who died this past Monday. Ruth is the aunt of Joy Warner, Jeff Freel, Jennifer Fischer, and Jill Craven

Prayers of celebration for Jim Denhart who had his cast taken off this past week and also prayers for him as he underwent testing for his fluid retention this week and will have an outpatient surgery this Wednesday on his liver to hopefully help with the fluid. Prayers for both him and Rita during this time.

Prayers for all in our community and around the world who are losing their jobs or for folks whose hours are being cut due to the spread of COVID and the shutting down of businesses.

Nancy Dorrell, her family, and medical staff in your prayers. She has been on our prayer list before as she has suffered with breast cancer for a long time. Doctors found a new growth in the site which has led to more tests and new treatment. Nancy is the sister of Ed Myers

Cathy Johnston who has recently been diagnosed with cancer. Cathy is the daughter in law of Dee and Bob Johnston. We offer prayers for Mike, Amanda, David, and their whole family as they grieve her diagnosis and begin a new treatment for Cathy

Marty Martin who continues to recover from his long hospital stay and his leg amputation.

One of Centennial's previous pastor's, Pastor Bill Cotton, who has moved to Wesley Acres with health problems. If you'd like to send him a card, we have his new address, please let myself or Gayle Jordan know.

LeeAnn Martin who recently heard from her work that her coworkers have been exposed to COVID-19 from someone who works with them. LeeAnn is staying home and working on keeping herself and her family healthy.

Evan Fischer's co-worker: Allison Johnson and her child Lucy, who were in a hit and run accident. Prayers for them as they recover from the shock of the crash

Alice who is a four year old battling cancer. We offer prayers for her, her family, and friends as they have to wait another few weeks for her next surgery due to the spread of COVID

For Maggie Stout's neighbor who is in the sixth grade and is undergoing cancer treatments.

We continue to lift up people around the world who are in care facilities or hospitals where they cannot have visitors of any kind, including their family. We ask that God's comforting presence be with them and remind them they are not alone; we give thanks for health care workers all over the world who are caring for people with and without the virus. And we still lift up teachers, administrators, students, and more who are affected by the closing of schools for many weeks in our prayers. We pray for parents who are navigating full time jobs and caring for children while at home.

These prayers are only some of the prayers that our community holds at this time, but I trust that God hears these prayers said aloud, and the prayers being kept silently in our hearts.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God,

As crowds of people welcomed Jesus when he rode into Jerusalem, acclaiming him as their ruler, so now we welcome you to our time of worship: God, Creator, Christ and Spirit. You reign above all human powers and dominions, you lay rightful claim to our praise and our love. Today we gather near and far to worship you, to reflect on your word. We are like the people of Jerusalem so long ago-- hungry for a hero, craving some glimpse of greatness. We longingly await to see a glimpse of our Messiah. As we wait here for our savior, give us the courage to follow where the one on the donkey may lead us. We give thanks for the gift of Christ who asks us to follow the paths of compassion and care. And now we offer our thanksgiving by praying the prayer Christ taught his disciples saying:

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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Scripture read by Whitney Warner

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying 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. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." 4 This 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."

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The 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!"

10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Hymn #278 "Hosanna Loud Hosanna

You can find the hymn on our website under the "Sermon Videos" tab.

Prayer before Sermon

Gracious God, help us to find courage and peace in Your Word today. May these reflections give glory to You, the one who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. Help us remember the risk of those who chose to gather for you that day as we cherish their sacrifice and claim to make a similar commitment this week. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Sermon

Weeks leading up to the march that happened on August 28, 1963, families and groups of people were planning how they would travel to Washington DC. Many people shared that they weren't entirely sure what they were going for, some shared they felt they had to go to hear Martin speak, others went because they believed wholeheartedly in the power of justice, others argued with their parents and spouses, convincing them that this was an event they couldn't miss, even if it meant they had to put themselves in danger. People of all races, ages, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, and geographical locations gathered as a crowd to witness history. Once he started to talk, the crowd was silenced. Even adults now who recall their time in the crowd as seven year olds, remember the quiet stillness that fell over everyone in the midst of his speech.

Robert Boyd, a New York City fireman in the 60's, recalls how he didn't want to go to the march, but his wife wanted to. He said to her, "I don't want to get involved in any of this civil rights stuff." But Boyd's wife said to him, "Civil rights stuff? We have this nice apartment, you have your job, and I have my job at the bank because of the civil rights stuff." So they went. Boyd recalls, "I don't remember listening to the speech, but I remember the impact it had on the people, the audience. Thousands and thousands of people, and not a word. And then when he finished his speech, it was an uproar, a crescendo, and this joyous noise. Then I realized this is something."

Others traveled to DC with more expectations. A woman recalls that she was 11 years old when she went to the march. Luckily, she said her parents had instilled enough consciousness in her to understand at the time what was happening. She shares about the day of the march, saying, "It was a day of pride, even at my age; it was a day that we really felt empowered... [the speech] ignited in me the desire to be a different type of person. I didn't want to be the soft-spoken, take a back seat type of woman... I became bolder, more confident, not afraid to stand up to anyone no matter their race, profession or wealth. I don't feel 'less than' anyone."

These reflections from the March on Washington for jobs & freedom reflect what I imagine occurred the day of Jesus' parade entrance into the city of Jerusalem. Except, his entrance is less of a parade, and more of a protest: like the March on Washington in 1963. While Jesus parades into the city on the back of a donkey, imagine Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, enters the other side of the city on a war horse. Jesus' simple parade on a donkey with coats and branches from the trees laying down on the road to make a path juxtaposes Pilate's glorious parade with his imperial majesty, weapons, banners, and guards to emphasize the power of the empire. Every part of Christ's parade: from the female donkey and her colt to the cloaks laid down on the road, points toward the discrepancies between the power of God's kingdom and the power of the empire, giving us a view into the week ahead of us. Jesus' parade is less of a parade and more of a protest of resistance.

50 years before the March on Washington for jobs and freedom, thousands of women marched on Washington one day before the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson. The organizers hoped the march would help reinvigorate the suffragette movement, even though it still took seven years for the nineteenth amendment to be ratified. Nonetheless, On March 3, 1913, thousands of women risked their status and safety to find power together. Like the crowd that gathered in Jerusalem, the crowd in Washington on March 3rd, watched leaders of the American Woman Suffrage Association lead the protest riding on the backs of animals.

The protest led by Christ that we celebrate each year on Palm Sunday shares themes with other protests that recognize the power that comes from gathering as common folks to accomplish what they cannot do on their own.

First, people from all over gathered to see Christ. Many of them likely didn't realize the full impact on their gathering either. Like Robert Boyd in the 60's, not sure that he wanted to be a part of the civil rights groups, he went anyway. It is likely that people in the crowds at Jesus' parade weren't entirely convinced until the moment he showed up on the back of a donkey instead of a war horse. Families travelled from near and far, both skeptics and followers, to witness the parade of cloaks and palms. They gathered to find inspiration outside of the false promises of the empire; skeptics and convinced followers travelled with the hope of a new future for all people rather than just for the rich few. Convinced wives brought their skeptical husbands. Converted folk invited their doubtful friends; young kids tagged along with their hopeful parents. The whole crowd likely didn't know what to expect, but they all received a new hope of God's kingdom on that Palm Sunday as they shouted his name in unison proclaiming Jesus as a prophet of God.

Second, people from all over gathered and were in awe of Christ. The way people talk about how silent the crowds were to hear Martin Luther King Jr speak, they recall that not one baby in the crowd cried. People gathered from near and far and they were in awe. If they gathered at the parade for Pilate, they would have seen symbols of power and dominance from the soldiers guarding the governor and stood passively watching how Pilate would maintain order amongst the crowd. But for the people who gathered and stood in the crowd at Jesus' entrance, they stood in awe of the simplicity of it all. God shows up in the midst of this crowd, not with symbols of power and dominance, but instead with a mother donkey and her colt, with leaves and cloaks setting the path instead of some red carpet. The crowd didn't passively wait and hear what commands Christ would order, like the crowds did with Pilate. Instead, they lay down their cloaks as a symbol of their commitment to and what they have to sacrifice to follow him. They aren't silent, but they yell "Hosanna," meaning Save us, perhaps because they know the empire can't. The people stand in awe of Christ's triumphant entry, probably because his entrance wasn't the triumphant entry of splendor and pomp they expected, but instead triumphant through humility and gentleness.

Third, from all over desperately needed change. Perhaps the crowds *expected* splendor and pomp from Christ's entry, but that's not what they *needed*. The people of the crowd, whether they were committed followers or not, needed the hope of something else than the power-hungry deceptions of the empire. The common folk who gathered for Christ's parade needed the power of God through the healings of Christ and the promises of God's kingdom that included them all. Like the women who demanded the right to receive a voters ballot on March 3rd 1913, or those who gathered day after day to provide safe passage for those enslaved through the underground railroad throughout the 19th century, or like the people who gathered on Washington to demand racial justice for jobs and freedom in 1963, or those who gathered in 1969 for the Moratorium March on Washington to end the War in Vietnam: the people who gathered for Christ's entry parade that turned into a protest did so seeking change, rooted in hope; seeking peace embodied in reconciliation; seeking mercy rooted in humility. And as they set down their cloaks and tree branches, they witnessed exactly that in the form of God's Anointed One: their messiah.

And lastly, people risked their lives to see Christ. The act of taking off one's cloak to create a path for Christ and these two donkeys, symbolizes the type of risk one must take to participate not just as the crowd, but as true followers of Christ. Palm Sunday isn't just a celebration and a parade for Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, but it's the beginning of this somber week that we have yet to journey through. Palm Sunday reminds us that protests are risky business and so

was committing to follow Christ in the first century. The crowd showed up at Jesus' entry at the risk of their lives as the Roman government believed there could only be one Son of God, and according to the government, that son was Pilate. But, to gather separate from Pilate's parade chanting "Hosanna," that was a risk these followers were willing to take as they received uncommon courage from gathering together to do what they couldn't do alone. Like those who gather for protests and marches around the world who demanded justice, the followers who gathered at Jesus' entry did so at personal risk for their lives as Jesus' parade turned protest clearly illustrated the opposition between the current oppression of the empire and the hope-full liberation accompanied with God's kingdom.

This Palm Sunday, we can find hope and solidarity in the risk of the crowd at Jesus' triumphant entry, as well as the rich history of common folk gathering with uncommon courage demanding to be taken seriously, to be heard, to be seen. I've almost always understood Palm Sunday to be a celebration, even in the midst of recognizing the complexities of Christ's entry with the opposition of Pilate's leadership. However, the similarities between how Christ and others have challenged oppression provide meaningful connections to our lived experiences and the experiences of our family members who perhaps Marched on Washington either for or in solidarity with black Americans seeking justice or of the women who demanded for the right to vote. Our lives and the lives of our ancestors have seen and experienced risk for the purposes of liberation: luckily for us, Christianity started on this same path of risk.

As we begin this holy week, I find hope in the risk that lives deep in the roots of our Christian faith. This risk, cloaked with hope for desperate change in the order of power; risk clothed in uncommon courage from common folk gathering to do what one cannot do alone; risk dressed in the lives of those who travelled from near and far to bear witness to God's humble and gentle power-- for this holy risk: I give thanks.

One unfortunate piece about crowds and protests though, is that they aren't always places of holy social change and we're about to be reminded of this reality this week. Soon, we will be reminded how sometimes the influence of the crowd overpowers an individual's ability to consciously make their own decisions. The crowd mentality overpowers and betrays the very person they lay down palms and cloaks for today. Perhaps it will do us good to keep this image in our minds as we approach the events of this holy week-- remembering which crowd we hope to belong to.

So I wonder, this week-- will we choose to join Pilate's parade or Christ's holy protest? Are we willing to take risks for the reign of God's kingdom-- a powerful kingdom not of domination and oppression, but a kingdom filled with gentleness, humility, mercy, & love? Will we choose the temporal comfort of a war horse and splendor or will we choose the eternal compassion of the man who rides in on a mother donkey dragging her colt alongside her?

My choice won't be the same every week. Sometimes I mistakenly choose the temporary comfort of power and control now instead of God's peace that prevails. But I was reminded of a Franciscan blessing this week, that I can recite anytime I want to choose the violent power of Pilate over the gentle power of God and I offer this blessing to all of us now:

"May God bless us with discomfort--discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts. May God bless us with anger--anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace. May God bless us with tears--tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy. And may God bless us with foolishness--enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done." May it be so. Amen.

Offering

As we are not currently sharing in worship together, we still have opportunities for people to faithfully give to the church. You can give by sending a check in the mail through online giving You can also offer to the church in ways that are not financial offerings, but offering your gifts, too. Please consider offering to the church this week through your prayers for our world and through your commitment to compassionately care for all of God's creation this week. As you consider offering your gifts to the church, we'll join in singing:

Hymn #314 "In the Garden"

Offering Prayer

God of all that is good,

We offer our gifts to you and the building of your merciful kingdom today and everyday. Through our acts of compassion, in our care for your creation, through our financial giving, and in our prayers for one another-- through all of this, we are offering ourselves to your mission of hope. This week, may we give our gifts with the reassurance that You are the One we hope to follow, even if it means less splendor and status. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Benediction

Thank you so much for sharing in this time of worship with me-- I pray that you felt the love of God wherever it was that you shared in this time of worship. As we depart from this time of worship, I'd like our community prayer to be our benediction for this morning. May this prayer that I invite you to say aloud with me, help us begin this holy week with a spirit of courage, compassion, and peace:

**Inspire our hearts, O God,
to follow where Christ walked,
for Christ has marked us as his own.**

**You have fed us all
out of your own generous and gracious hands.
From them, we have received welcome,
nourishment, hope, and grace.
May these things grow in us,
alongside the gift of faith.**

**And through the Holy Spirit,
guide us in the week ahead
to remember our place
in your great ongoing story
of resurrection, redemption, & restoration.
Amen.**

God be with You Till We Meet Again