



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
235 South Kenilworth Avenue, Elmhurst, IL  
*Partners in Christ's Service since 1890*

***PALM SUNDAY/ PASSION SUNDAY***  
At Home or Small Group Worship for April 5<sup>th</sup>

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**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Lent began in the wilderness; it concludes in Jerusalem.  
*Briefly, think about or share what this means to you.*

We come near to the end of one story. Another will soon begin.  
*Briefly, think about or share what this means to you.*

**OPENING PRAYER**

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is God's only Son, who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed is the Lamb of God who suffers for our sake. Hosanna in the highest! Amen.

**GLORIA PATRI #35**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son  
And to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning  
Is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.

**PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH**

Prayer Hymn #566 Be Still My Soul (v. 1)

Be still my soul, for God is on your side,  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.  
Trust in your God, your savior and your guide,  
Who through all changes faithful will remain.  
Be still my soul, your best, your heavenly friend,  
Through thorny ways leads to a peaceful end.

Silent Prayer

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Lord, how we love parades. We get caught up in the excitement of being in the crowd and the joy of the celebration.

We especially love this parade on Palm Sunday. Today, we enter Holy Week. A time to walk with Christ in his last days. We start and end this week with a celebration. This week will be anything but easy. We confess, O Lord, too often we are tempted to enjoy the exuberance of Palm Sunday and then leap to the triumph of Easter.

This year is different, Lord.

The whole world is suffering during this pandemic. We are hurting, anxious, and worried about today and the weeks ahead. We are unsure about what tomorrow will bring. In these difficult days, more than ever, we are grateful for your love as we hope and pray each day to hear the news that the virus is no longer a threat.

In this time of prayer, we seek your guidance and courage as we face the trials of our own lives and support those we love. Be with those whose lives are in danger due to the Coronavirus. Be with those whose bodies and spirits grieve. Be with the most vulnerable of your children; the poor, the outcast, the marginalized, the abused, the frightened, the lost.

We lift in prayer the heroic efforts of the medical professionals who put their own lives at risk to help those who are desperately ill. We celebrate Christ and our discipleship. We ask you to remind us that when difficulties come over us, to gather good friends and share our love with others without restraint.

God of Grace, we ask you to walk with us and sustain us for the days ahead. Praying in the name of the One who teaches us to pray.... Our Father,

## **OUR LORD'S PRAYER**

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

## **The Magic Penny Song**

Chorus:

Love is something if you give it away,  
Give it away, give it away.  
Love is something if you give it away,  
You end up having more.

It's just like a magic penny.  
Hold it tight and you won't have any.  
Lend it, spend it, and you'll have so many  
They'll roll all over the floor.

(chorus)

Money's dandy and we like to use it,  
But love is better if you don't refuse it.  
It's a treasure and you'll never lose it  
Unless you lock up your door.

(chorus)

**CHILDREN'S MESSAGE** *can be found on the church website*

**MUSIC MINISTRY** *can be found on the church website*

**SCRIPTURE & MESSAGE** *also on the church website*

Matthew 21:6-11 (NIV)

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,  
“Hosanna to the Son of David!”  
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”  
“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”  
The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

## SERMON

Usually, our Palm Sunday is beautifully ushered in by our church school children and youth as they parade around the sanctuary waving palms at the start of the worship service. The church organ blasts away, and the whole congregation sings, "All Glory, Laud, and Honor!"

Due to social distancing, we are in a variety of locations. But, in spirit, we are together, and in Christ's love, our bond is strong. And we still get to enjoy this parade.

Today's story is timeless and captures our imagination because of its rich symbolism and intense meaning. Remember, in Jesus' time, parades were common, but mostly they were military parades. Parades were a sign of strength and might, to celebrate victory in battle, or a change in leadership.

Shouting HOSANNA was one way to send up a cheer as a regional governor or a new king passed-by. Hosanna is a word much like the word "hurray!" A sound of praise and joy!

HOSANNA is what they shouted at Jesus in Jerusalem on that day. We remember that day as Palm Sunday. The road entering Jerusalem and leading to the temple was lined with people ready to celebrate because they knew this is going to be the best parade ever.

They knew because five hundred years earlier, the prophet Zechariah had said that one day there would be a parade like Palm Sunday.

The prophet Zechariah said it this way:  
*Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem.  
Look, your king will come to you.  
He is righteous and victorious.  
He is humble and riding on a colt,  
the offspring of a donkey.*

This ancient promise was etched permanently in the mind of a glory-starved nation. For half a millennium, the Jewish people kept one eye toward the horizon to watch for King David's successor gallop into town and reclaim the throne.

When Jesus decides it is finally time for the worlds most anticipated parade, they are ready. It is Passover. It is Israel's Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas all rolled into one. Jerusalem is as crowded as Times Square on New Year's Eve. And as Jesus, the Son of David, rides into his capital city, the people, who never gave up hope, never gave up on waiting, rushed out into the streets to wave and cheer wildly.

HOSANNA! HOSANNA! IT'S CORONATION TIME! HOSANNA! HOSANNA!

The Messiah has arrived.

And, as a sure sign, Jesus rides the royal *mule* into the city, which would have brought excitement and pandemonium to the crowd.

Think about it. King David was a hill-country ruler. King David would not have ridden a horse, because a horse is for those who dwell on the plains, for those who crisscross highways on broad and straight landscapes. David got his start, leading along steep terrain and rugged trails. Rulers in the high country favored a sturdy donkey over the finest horse.

No wonder those who told of a Messiah to assume the throne of David always had that person riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. This somewhat comical sight would have amused the Roman overlords—but Jewish zealots who knew their history would not have missed the symbolism. This day should have been their greatest day!

Once in the city, they must have expected Jesus to walk onto the stage and grab a microphone to say, "Thank you, Jerusalem! What a fantastic parade. What a wonderful welcome. What a great crowd. I cannot tell you how happy the disciples and I are to be here. I appreciate your support. Together we can make this the biggest, best Passover ever. Give your selves a big hand."

Lots of folks—even the disciples—thought Jesus would head to the temple for a coronation. But, that is not what happened.

Five days later, the grand marshal of the parade will be taken out of Jerusalem and executed. The one coming into town in glory gets a crown of thorns. The nameplate they nail over his head on a cross is meant as a cartoon caption: "King of the Jews."

The crowd now shouts, "What happened?! You were supposed to be king!" This is *not* what we have been hoping for. And so, the king's followers are not following anymore. They figure they were wrong about this guy, and go their separate ways until next time.

Today, it is still tempting to praise Jesus without staying with him. Like the Palm Sunday crowd, we want to see what we want to see. Honestly, don't we want our Messiah to change the world for us? A Messiah who makes our lives easier? A Messiah, we would enjoy following?

It is too easy to leave a gaping chasm between what we applaud and what we do.  
*Reflecting on this very thing is what makes Holy Week such an important time.*

Reverend David Mosser challenges us to thwart these types of paradoxes: "Jesus was courageous; we are careful. Jesus trusted the unworthy; we trust those with good collateral. Jesus forgave the unforgivable; we forgive selectively. Jesus was righteous and laughed at respectability; we are respectable and smile at genuine righteousness. Jesus had no place to lay his head and did not worry about it; we fret when we do not have the latest convenience. Jesus did what he believed to be right regardless of consequences; we determine what is right by how it will affect us. Jesus feared God but not the world; we fear public opinion more than we fear God's judgment. Jesus risked everything for God; we try to make religion safe."

True disciples take their place with Jesus, give their lives away, go to the hard places of the world, and do the difficult things. Fourteenth-century German theologian Meister Eckhart once wrote, "There are plenty to follow our Lord halfway, but not the other half. Christ is forever asking, "Do you *really* believe that love is superior to success and comfort? Do you really want to follow?""

A lot of us want Jesus to be a certain way. We want God to solve our problems. We want God to agree to what we think is best. Why can't Jesus be the champion of our causes? And, when things don't go our way, it feels as if God let us down.

The story of Palm Sunday reminds us that this is not how it works.

Jesus rode on a donkey onto the biggest stage of the world to show us that he has better plans.

And for that, we can all shout HOSANNA! Amen

## **OFFERING**

*Let us cast our gifts before God, as palms were cast before Jesus.  
Let us give our gifts that they may become a greater blessing in God's hands.*

### Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

**HYMN**

## All Glory, Laud, and Honor

All glory, laud and honor  
to you, Redeemer, King,  
to whom the lips of children  
made sweet hosannas ring.

You are a child of Israel,  
Great David's greater Son;  
you ride in lowly triumph,  
Messiah, blessed One!

**BENEDICTION**

Go forth and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted. Honor all people. Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you, amen.