

All Hymns are from 'Sing Your Faith' aka 'The Purple Book'

Opening Music: 1. 'Last Spring by Grieg'

Opening Music 2. 'Its still not going to rain' by Lizzie Hornby

Welcome:

Good morning and Welcome, whether you are here in the church or joining us online. Welcome whoever you are, and however you are feeling, whatever you carry in your heart, and bring with you, cares and concerns or celebrations, sadness or joys, you are welcome, especially if you are joining us for the first time.

However we join in, each one of us is part of our community, contributing by being connected in spirit, and all are equally valued. We begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith. If you are at home, and have a candle, you may like to light it now.

Chalice Lighting: adapted from words by Elizabeth M Strong

We light our chalice to remember the sorrow, the loss and the joy within this season of the year.

The Passover, which brought freedom from slavery and bondage for the Jewish people, continues to bring light into the world.

Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter, which brought joy and triumph of life over death for the Christian people, still bring to a world, so often dark and despairing, the light of joy and love.

The recent spring equinox, bringing lengthening daylight hours and new life bursting forth. Passover for freedom, Easter for life, spring for rebirth:
We light our chalice for all three.

Opening Words: A morning Invocation by Tess Ward, Anglican priest, hospital chaplain and spiritual director.

Divine Peacemaker, You know the rising of passion at all that is not just.
You know that peace comes not sweet-faced and false, but with a sword.

Come with your sword of justice and cut away all that beguiles me and keeps me from seeing the truth.

Cut away the layers I create so I can avoid relating.
Cut away my shame when it blinds me to another's power to humiliate and does not belong to me

Cut away the anxieties that prevent me from looking towards the world.

Cut away all the tasks I invent to shore up kin and kind so I may remember my *unknown* family, who will go without today,

Cut away the complexity of my daily doing, so I may love simply,

Divine spirit, bring me your peace as I set forth this day.

1st Hymn: No 62: 'Here we have gathered'

Here we have gathered, gathered side by side;
circle of kinship, come and step inside!
May all who seek here find a kindly word;
May all who speak here feel they have been heard.
Sing now together, this our heart's own song.

Here we have gathered, called to celebrate
days of our lifetime, matters small and great:
we of all ages, women, children, men,
infants and sages, sharing what we can.
Sing now together, this our heart's own song.

Life has its battles, sorrow and regret:
but in the shadows, let us not forget:
we who now gather know each other's pain;
kindness can heal us: as we give we gain.
Sing now in friendship this, our heart's own song.

(Words by Alicia S. Carpenter b. 1930)

Prayers:

Let us pause and hold in our thoughts and prayers all those in our own church community and in the wider world, who are experiencing difficult, sad or worrying times, whether through illness, accident, or bereavement, human actions or natural causes.

We pray for all those whose lives have been changed forever, or lost, due to the pandemic, around the world. We give thanks that many people, including some in our own church community, have come through it, to return in person soon. May we have the wisdom to remain vigilant and careful, despite the lifting of restrictions, to help keep us all safe, especially the most vulnerable. We pray that there be a better sharing of the vaccine, around the world, for none of us is truly safe until all are safe.

We hold in our prayers all who are subject to tyranny, persecution, and war, especially the many whose livelihoods and lives have been destroyed, and the countless numbers fleeing for their lives from Ukraine. We pray that those who claim to be their leaders be blessed with compassion and the wisdom to prevent further destruction. May those rushing to escape: vulnerable young families and the elderly, find sanctuary and peace. May the places to which they flee, somehow find the strength and resources to provide what is needed.

May we have the gift of true compassion, to enable us to be with them in some way, however small it may seem to us, to act in a neighbourly way, to bring back a little joy and happiness into their lives.

May those of us who have been spared such traumatic events, be ever mindful that each one of us will be touched by sad as well as joyful events and may we be moved to offer comfort and solace to one another. And let us give thanks for the happy events which lighten our hearts. May we contribute to and benefit from the resources of love and strength our church community offers, to us and to the wider community outside our doors....AMEN

Let us take a short pause for our own silent prayers

Universal Prayer for Peace – words on screen

Lead me from death to life,
from falsehood to truth;
lead me from despair to hope,
from fear to trust;
lead me from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart,
our world, our universe –
Peace, peace, peace

Reading 1. The Entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21 verses 1 – 17; The Common English Bible)

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. He said to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that their master needs them.” He sent them off right away.

Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, “Say to Daughter Zion, “Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey’s offspring.” The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then he sat on them.

Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. “Who is this?” they asked. The crowds answered, “It’s the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Then Jesus went into the temple and threw out all those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. He said to them, “It’s written, My house will be called a house of prayer. But you’ve made it a hideout for thieves.”

People who were blind and lame came to Jesus in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and legal experts saw the amazing things he was doing and the children shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were angry. They said to Jesus, “Do you hear what these children are saying?”

“Yes,” he answered. “Haven’t you ever read, ‘From the mouths of babies and infants you’ve arranged praise for yourself?’ ” Then he left them and went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there

Reading 2. 'The Donkey' a poem by GK Chesterton

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

2nd Hymn: No. 178 'Together now we join as one' (*Words by Rev Clifford Martin Reed. B 1947*)

Together now we join as one
our common faith to sing;
to render to this pilgrim world
our heartfelt offering.

We strive to be a fellowship
with mind and conscience free,
to search for truth and saving light
in cosmic mystery.

We worship God – love's source and power;
We celebrate the life
That all earth's children freely share
Beyond their sinful strife.

We would, in love, serve humankind
with caring, justice, peace;
and with the earth seek harmony
that pride and pillage cease.

We hold in reverence the man
Who walked in Galilee,
Who healed the sick and loved the poor –
Revealed divinity.

We welcome truth, we welcome light,
All prophecy and song,
Whoever they be channeled through
To all they shall belong.

Meditation: Be still in the silence and aware of the love within this place....

For the beauty that awaits us at the turning of the road
May there be within us the wonder and the welcome of the living soul

For the trials that await us
May there be calm strength,
Courage to trust when mists obscure the way,
Faith to venture when the issue seems uncertain

For the call to helpfulness
May there be quick sympathy and a ready response;

May we find gladness on our way
And the reassuring presence of helpers and friends;

May we find grace generously to forgive
And to seek or to work out our own forgiveness;

May our desires be tempered to our needs,
May we value and praise the simple and the lowly
As well as the difficult and the unusual;

May humour and the gift of laughter be ours,
May we be understanding, appreciative,
Reverent in our relations one to another,
Seeking to elicit another's best, And thereby our own. Amen

Approx 1 ½ Minutes Pause for Reflection

Reflective Music: 'Jesu, Joy of Man's desiring' 3mins 48s

ADDRESS – "PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS"

What do *you* think of when you hear the words " Palm Sunday"? *PAUSE* For me, its Pussy Willow in full flower. The furry buds shimmering yellow green in spring sunshine, looking for all the world as though some sprite had given them a liberal dusting of pollen with an enormous paintbrush. The idea was born from one Palm Sunday afternoon, when as a 6 or 7 year old, my parents took me for a walk by the shores of the local creek, lined with these beautiful trees. For years afterwards, I truly believed that it was branches of this English tree which were strewn along the path taken by Jesus on the donkey. I was happy on that Palm Sunday. The Easter school holidays had just begun and two glorious weeks of freedom and the promise of Hot Cross Buns and Easter eggs lay ahead. The memory came flooding back during my preparations for this Palm Sunday service.

Palm Sunday is the start of the most solemn week in the Christian calendar, but, of course, for Jesus, who was a Jew, it was just a few days before the start of Passover week, one of the most important in the Jewish calendar. The day when, as we heard in the reading from St Matthew's gospel, the crowds surrounding Jesus were *very* happy, ecstatically so, shouting, "Hosanna", and

strewn the pathway with branches cut from palm trees and some even flinging down their clothing. The whole city of Jerusalem is described as being stirred up. Many people thought that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, who would lead them to freedom from the Roman occupation.

All four gospels carry accounts of the events, with some variations, but all agree that the happiness wasn't to last. Luke tells us that as Jesus approached Jerusalem, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Sobering words, not the 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' we were taught about as children! and worse was to come when Jesus entered the temple where all kinds of people were preparing for the Passover. Greedy traders had set out their tables, where they cheated people by overcharging them for animals to sacrifice for Passover, and money changers were charging excessively for their services. The poor, especially, were finding it very hard to pay for what to them, were necessities. The parallels with our present day situation are hard to ignore When Jesus saw the abuse of both the temple and the people, he was again overcome with emotion. He overturned the tables, pushing the greedy traders from the temple courtyard. "This is our holy temple and it should be a house of prayer", he said, "but you have made it into a den of robbers."

You could interpret Jesus' feelings and his reaction in two ways.

Firstly, you could say that Jesus shed tears out of frustration, anger, and disillusionment at the way people had strayed so far from their God and from each other. They had become blind to any possibility of the love and peace that were right in front of them. So, he lashed out with terrifying predictions, in dreadful detail about the siege and eventual fall of Jerusalem —including the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple and all the citizens. The people would endure the consequences years ahead.

But the alternative is that Jesus was heart-broken and overcome with grief for Jerusalem. He saw the people had turned away from the path of love and peace. Jesus wept because he knew that peace would not, and could not, come from conflict and violence. The reality of his ministry and all that was yet to be for his people and his land hit him hard. The tears came and he let them fall down his face. When he saw poor pilgrims being cheated out of their scarce resources by greedy traders, who put profit above everything, and in the most sacred of places, he was undone, not only angry, but also heart broken, despairing and disillusioned.

And the people would also feel disillusioned when they realised Jesus was not the leader they expected. He wasn't a soldier. He wasn't going to lead a bunch of rebels in a fighting force to take Jerusalem and the country back from the occupying Roman Army. He would have realised that was impossible and anyway, that wasn't his way. The lives of Jewish people were difficult, harassed by the occupying forces, with refugees from wars and famines in other countries, adding to the problems. As a baby, Jesus had been a refugee himself, and would have felt for their plight. Robbers roamed the countryside, so it wasn't safe to travel alone, as Jesus referred to in his parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus wasn't a political leader, neither was he a priest or a scholar, although his disciples had referred to him as Rabbi.

His was the way of compassion, love and peace, but that wasn't what the masses wanted in a leader. Eventually at the end of a week which had begun so well, he shared a supper of bread and wine with his Disciples – what we now refer to as 'The last Supper' where he was betrayed, and arrested. When the crowd was asked, they preferred to let a thief escape cruel execution, rather than this man of peace.

Whatever one's beliefs about what happened on Easter Sunday, the legacy Jesus left was an exemplary example of how inspiring is a life lived well. One could say he lives on in the example he set us, in the inspiration which has come down to us over two thousand years.

Our world is not so different from the one in which Jesus lived – there is still poverty, wars famine, disease and countless people fleeing them.

As UU Rev. Margaret A. Beckman says,

What about us? What can we see? What can we do? What will we give to the cause of peace and justice in our world? Are we able to see the things that make for peace?

Are we able to see that love and compassion are the way to true victory?

Are we able to see that the widow, the orphan, and the refugee are our responsibility and that justice calls us to love them with all that we have?

I'd like to end on a more optimistic note: If each one of us can do some of that, and act with compassion and love, to enable one little child be as happy and carefree as my 6 year old self on that Palm Sunday all those years ago, then the world will be a little better on *this* Palm Sunday.

Final Hymn: No. 177 'To you who would as pilgrims go'

To you who would as pilgrims go
with eager steps and hearts aglow,
when on the holy city bent
be not deterred from high intent.

For people need triumphant days
with ample reassuring praise,
and palms extol while thorns do not –
and none would choose the martyr's lot.

So easy now to join the throng
with flowering branch and palm and song.
So hard to see on such a day
the beggar's hand beside the way.

How fine to do the pleasant deed,
to serve the current favoured need,
but hope needs those who think and choose –
uphold a cause they well may lose.

For those who would as pilgrims go
both scorn and failure well may know,
and high intent can lead to pain
and gifts must never be for gain.
(Words by Janet H. Bowering)

Closing Words: by Rev. Cliff Reed

From raised hopes to disillusion;

From fellowship to betrayal;

From gentle triumph to brutal death;

This is the drama of this holy week.

May we pass through it in full awareness

Of its timeless truths, learning compassion and courage, trusting always that after darkness comes the dawn. Go in peace

Closing Music: 'Roots & Wings' a Piano Piece by Lizzie Hornby

Extinguish Chalice

Closing Video: Song: 'Bread and Wine' by Josh Garrels

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