

Opening Music: 'Last Spring' by Greig

<https://youtu.be/nY3DnoKMOFo>

Welcome: Good morning and Welcome, whether you are here in the church, joining us online or watching the recording later. Welcome whoever you are, and however you are feeling, whatever you carry in your heart, and bring with you, cares, hopes, concerns, sadness or joys. You are very welcome, if you are joining us for the 1st 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 flame 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.

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 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: Purple 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.

Music: 'Old 124th' Genevan Psalter, 1551 Words © Alicia S. Carpenter. Used by permission.

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 hold in our prayers all who are subject to tyranny, persecution, and war in too many countries around the world. We also hold in our prayers the many thousands who have lost their homes, their livings, loved relations and those who have died following the recent earthquake in Myanmar. May the rescue workers find the strength for such difficult work. May those trying to escape: especially vulnerable young families, the disabled 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. We pray that those who claim to be their leaders be blessed with compassion and the wisdom to prevent further destruction.

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 ease the sadness, to bring back a sense of calm, maybe even a little joy 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 A M E N

Story: Its time for our story, this week a reading from the Bible, about Jesus's Entry into Jerusalem and subsequent events

Matthew 21 v.v. 1 - 17 (New King James Version (NKJV))

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."

All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

"Tell the daughter of Zion,
'Behold, your King is coming to you,
Lowly, and sitting on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey.'

So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!"

And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?"

So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee."

Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?"

And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read,
'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise'?"
Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.

And now for a short poem, which Margaret will read for us now:

Reading '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: Purple 178 'Together now we join as one'

Together now we join as one
our common faith to sing;
to render to this pilgrim world
our heart felt 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 channelled through
to all they shall belong.

Music 'St. Fulbert' Henry Jiohn Gauntlett, 1805 1878
Words © Clifford Martin Reed b 1947 Used by permission.

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'

<https://youtu.be/uKq5IcBFyeQ>

ADDRESS – “PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS”

Today is 'Palm Sunday' What do *you* think of when you hear those words? *PAUSE* For me, its Pussy Willow in full flower. Furry buds, shimmering in spring sunshine, looking for all the world as though some sprite had given them a liberal dusting of pollen with an enormous paintbrush. This fanciful 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 into Jerusalem, taken by Jesus on the donkey! I was happy on that Palm Sunday some hmmm! years ago. School Easter holidays had just begun, with the prospect of a glorious fortnight of freedom, Hot Cross Buns at Sunday School and Easter eggs from my family. This memory came flooding back to me during this past sunny week, while preparing the service for *this* Palm Sunday.

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 a few days before Passover, one of the most important weeks in the Jewish calendar. It was on this day, described by Matthew, read by Stephen earlier, that

Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds of people surrounding Jesus were very happy, ecstatically so, shouting, "Hosanna", strewing the pathway with branches torn 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 these 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! Worse was to come when Jesus entered the temple where many different people were preparing for the Passover. Greedy traders at their tables were cheating pilgrims by overcharging them for animals to sacrifice for Passover. The 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 — this time of anger. He overturned the tables, and pushed 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."

This was not the 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' as a hymn remembered from my childhood described him!

You could interpret Jesus' feelings and his reaction in more than one way.

One could say that Jesus shed tears out of frustration, anger, and disillusionment at the way people had strayed so far from God and 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 the Temple and all the citizens of Jerusalem. The people would endure the consequences for years to come — and they did some decades later.

But you could say 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 not only angry, but also heart broken, despairing and disillusioned.

I'd like to read a poem here. It is 'Palm Sunday' by Theodore Maynard (1890–1956), (English born poet, literary critic, and historian. Lived in England until 1920, before moving to America where he lived the rest of his life)

Caiahpus mentioned in this poem was a high priest of the Jews, A. D. 27 to 36. A Sadducee, and bitter enemy of Christ. At his palace the priests, etc., met after the resurrection of Lazarus, to plot the death of Jesus, lest all the people should believe on him.

‘Palm Sunday’

The grey hairs of Caiaphas
Shall know the truth to-day,
For kingly, riding on an ass,
The Truth has come his way.
(A thornbush grows upon the hill,
And Golgotha is empty still!)

Caiaphas waxes eloquent
On tittle and on jot,
But when they cry " Hosanna! "
Caiaphas answers not.
(A thornbush grows upon the hill,
And Golgotha is empty still!)

In the temple of Caiaphas
Stand two gold seraphim —
They do not worship Christ nor shout
As the grey stones shout for Him.
(A thornbush grows upon the hill,
And Golgotha is empty still!)

The vestments of Caiaphas
With gold and silver shone —
They would get soiled if he cast them down
For the ass to walk upon.
(A thornbush grows upon the hill,
And Golgotha is empty still!)

The religion of Caiaphas
Is very spick and span,
It does not love the ill-bred mob,
The homespun Son of Man!
(A thornbush grows upon the hill,
And Golgotha is empty still!)

The dark soul of Caiaphas
Is full of sin and pride;
It does not know the splendour
Or the triumph of that ride!
(A thornbush grows upon the hill,
And Golgotha is empty still!)

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. Jesus himself would have realised that was impossible and anyway, that wasn't his way. He was a rabbi – a teacher - saddened that his teachings were being ignored by many. He rode upon a donkey. A donkey – portrayed as rather a ridiculous animal in Chesterton's poem which Margaret, read not the steed of choice of a warrior!

The lives of ordinary Jewish people were difficult, harassed by the Roman occupying forces. The needs of refugees from wars and famines in neighbouring countries, added to their problems., Jesus himself had been a refugee as a baby , so 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 at that time. Eventually at the end of a week which had begun so well, they preferred to let a thief escape 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, and leaders not often blessed with much wisdom or compassion.

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?

If each one of can do some of that, and act with compassion and love, to enable just a few more little children to be as happy and carefree as my 6 year old self all those years ago, then the world will be a little better on this Palm Sunday.

Final Hymn: Purple 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 may well 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.

Music 'Church Triumphant' James William Elliott, 1833 - 1915
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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

Extinguish Chalice

Closing Video: 'All in the April Evening' sung by the Glasgow Orpheus Choir

https://youtu.be/Z8ojon1RJ4E?si=wNzRF0rMLAB9I_uJ