

Applewood United Church
An Affirming Community
Hybrid Worship for March 24, 2024
Palm Sunday

(*please stand in body or in spirit; **bold** print is for all)

Territorial Acknowledgement and Announcements

Centering Music: "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna" VU 123 verses 1&3

Hosanna, loud hosanna
the happy children sang;
through pillared court and temple
the joyful anthem rang;
to Jesus, who had blessed them
close folded to his breast,
the children sang their praises,
the simplest and the best.

'Hosanna in the highest!'
That ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer;
earth, let your anthems ring.
O may we ever praise him
with heart and life and voice,
and in his humble presence
eternally rejoice!

***Call to Worship**

One: Mighty and merciful God,
You are our rock, our shelter, our light,
our shepherd, our comfort, and our judge.
In these long, Lenten days
when we have searched our souls,
readying ourselves for the call to follow
our crucified and risen Lord,
make us sensitive, we pray,
in this final part of the journey,
to the sayings and searching of Christ
as He feels His way to the Cross,
seeking to embrace all
that You ask of Him,
so that we in our turn
may learn and engage
with all You are asking of us.

**All: Hosanna! Blessed is He
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Amen.**

***Opening Hymn: "All Glory Laud and Honour" VU 122**

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

You are the King of Israel,
and David's royal son,
now in the Lord's name coming,
our King and blessed one.

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

The multitude of pilgrims
with palms before you went;
our praise and prayer and anthems
before you we present.

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

To you, before your passion,
they sang their hymns of praise;
to you, now high exalted,
our melody we raise.

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

Their praises you accepted;
accept the prayers we bring,
great author of all goodness,
O good and gracious king.

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

***Opening Prayer**

All: Eternal God, this morning we have come to cheer you on. We can feel the excitement of the crowds who welcomed Jesus with such joy, and we want to join in, to share their hope, remembering your promise of a saviour. Bless us as we greet your Son, who arrives now. In his name we pray. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 118 VU 837 with Refrain (Bob Martin)

One: Let Israel now say:

All: "God's love endures forever."

One: Let the house of Aaron say:

All: "God's love endures forever."

One: Let those who fear God say:

All: "God's love endures forever."

Sung Refrain: VU 952

Through our lives and by our prayers your Kingdom come.

One: Open to me the gates of the temple, that I may enter and give thanks to God.

All: This is the gate of God; through it the righteous shall enter.

One: I thank you for you have answered me; you have become my salvation.

All: The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

One: This is God's doing, marvellous in our eyes.

All: This is the day that God has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Sung Refrain

Through our lives and by our prayers your Kingdom come.

One: Save us, O God, we pray;

All: God, we pray, give us success.

One: Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God.

All: We bless you from the house of God.

One: God, our God, has given us light;

All: with palm branches in hand let us march to the altar.

One: You are my God, and I will thank you;

All: you are my God, and I will extol you.

Sung Refrain

Through our lives and by our prayers your Kingdom come.

Gospel Mark 11:1-11 (Rev Alison)

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it,

you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." ' They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

One: For the word of God in Scripture
For the word of God among us
For the word of God within us

All: Thanks be to God.

Music: "Whisper of the Palms"

Sermon

**All: Humble and riding on a donkey
We greet you
Acclaimed by crowds and carolled by children
We cheer you
Moving from peace of the countryside to the corridors of power
We acknowledge you, Christ our Lord
You are giving the beasts of burden a new dignity;
You are giving majesty a new face; you are giving those who long for
redemption a new song to sing .
With them, with heart and voice, we shout 'Hosanna!'**

***Hymn:** "He Came Riding on a Donkey" VU 124

He came riding on a donkey,
he came riding into town;
slow and easy kind of lowly
he came riding with the dawn.
His disciples walked beside him,
staying close, a little shy;
not too sure where he would guide them,
on to live or on to die.
But all the morning sang his praises;
waking birds and dancing wind;
here he is, the Son of David;
riding on to take his throne.

Then the children gathered, singing
shouts of laughter, bursting cheer;
in the streets their song was ringing,
'Hosannas' filled the morning air.
Timid adults strained to see him,
caught the Spirit, joined the song;
spread their cloaks along before him,
branches flashing in the sun.
So all the city sang his praises;
waking streets and dancing crowd;
here he is, the Son of David;
our Messiah, Son of God.

In our fasting, and our feasting,
called to follow in his way;
called to walk his road to Easter,
called to live his cross today.
Hosanna to the Son of David,
hosanna in the heavens above;
blessed is he who comes to save us,
blessed is he who brings his love.
Let us join to sing his praises;
open hearts and souls to God;
he is with us, Son of David;
God's Messiah, Christ the Lord.

Invitation to the Offering:

Today, we are each invited to welcome Jesus. Some will offer their voices. Some will offer their possessions. Some will offer their presence. All are important and valid. Thank you for what you offer.

Offering of Music: "The Holy City"

***Hymn of Dedication:** "Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands" VU 537

Your work, O God, needs many hands
to help you everywhere,
and some there are who cannot serve
unless our gifts we share.

Because we love you and your work,
our offering now we make:
be pleased to use it as your own,
we ask for Jesus' sake.

Prayer of Dedication:

Gracious and welcoming God, we offer these gifts and those already given through PAR or online. May they be used to joyfully proclaim your vision and hope for our world. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

O God, who sings through Your creation
in the melody of its waters and the wind in the trees,
in the lilt of the songbird and the animal's call:
we give You thanks for the singers and musicians of old,
whose songs today we have heard and sung:
the songs and poetry of the prophets,
clothing their insights in a music
which lodges their teaching for ever in our minds;
the psalmists who recorded both joy and fear
in the first song book of the Church,
giving those who followed
a vocabulary with which to address God
and a medium through which God may speak to us.
We give thanks for later composers
who, finding inspiration in the life of Christ
and His message of hope and reconciliation,
have inspired us in turn by their music
and brought us closer to the mysteries of our faith.
We give thanks too for the writers of our hymns,
who in each new age give us songs to sing,
new words to engage us afresh on the way to the kingdom.
May our music and song draw the best from us,
and our melodies bring us into community
with each other and with Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession:

"Ashkelon shall see it and be afraid;
Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish;
Ekron also, because its hopes are withered. ...
He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations" (*Zechariah 9:5,10*)
Loving and Holy Spirit of God, hear our prayers.
We believe that You want us not just to serve
but to pray for the world to whose service You have called us,
in all its longing for peace, for justice, for reconciliation.

Hear our prayers today for those who struggle against tyrannies,
those damaged by natural disasters or blight caused by others' greed,
those forced out from their communities to seek refuge elsewhere;
for aid agencies, peace-keeping forces, rescue services at sea,
world organisations and alliances, national governments,
and those offering a welcome to asylum seekers in our towns.
If statistics are tears, the world weeps for release for so many:
the dispossessed, the falsely imprisoned, the undervalued,

the cruelly undernourished, the exploited, and the sick;
the deeply anxious who have everything and yet nothing,
miserable in their comfort, longing for love, to feel of value.
May they and we travel with You to Easter.
With these petitions, we give thanks
for saints and martyrs through the centuries,
and the many people forgotten by us but known to You,
who have challenged injustice and discrimination,
given voice to those unnoticed and unheard,
and helped to create communities where all are valued.
Through Jesus Christ we pray; Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: VU 960

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 them that trespass 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 and ever. Amen.

***Closing Hymn:** "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross" VU 142

Jesus, keep me near the cross;
there a precious fountain,
free to all, a healing stream,
flows from Calvary's mountain.

In the cross, in the cross,
be my glory ever,
till my raptured soul shall find
rest beyond the river.

Near the cross, a trembling soul,
love and mercy found me;
there the bright and morning star
sheds its beams around me.

In the cross, in the cross,
be my glory ever,
till my raptured soul shall find
rest beyond the river.

Near the cross! O Lamb of God,
bring its scenes before me;

help me walk from day to day
with its shadow o'er me.

In the cross, in the cross,
be my glory ever,
till my raptured soul shall find
rest beyond the river.

Near the cross I'll watch and wait,
hoping, trusting ever,
till I reach the golden strand
just beyond the river.

In the cross, in the cross,
be my glory ever,
till my raptured soul shall find
rest beyond the river.

***Benediction** (*Philippians 4:7*)

The peace of God,
which is beyond all understanding,
guard your thoughts and your hearts in Jesus Christ.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
Our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
be with you and those you love,
this day and always. Amen.

***Amen:** VU 967

Sermon:

One of the well-meaning, but hurtful phrases that is shared when a loved one dies is, "Everything happens for a reason."

I hate that phrase. I hate it with every fibre of my being. I hate it because when people say it, while they mean well, it implies that they know the reason for something occurring, and you don't. Hearing this phrase came across to us as judgmental, as well as downplaying our pain and our loss. As if a death could be neat, tidy, or explained away.

So, when I heard the title of a new book by Kate Bowler, who is an assistant professor at Duke Divinity School, I was drawn to checking it out, for it is entitled, *Everything Happens for a Reason: and Other Lies I've Loved*. Her book is essentially a memoir, written out of her experience of being diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer at the age of 35, and her wrestling to come to the place where she names that in fact, no, things just happen.

It's a powerful and incredible little book, and I can highly recommend giving it a read. (And if you're into podcasts, she has a podcast as well where she interviews various people.)

One of the things I found especially poignant were her words about this day, Palm Sunday and the story of it that Name read to us from Mark's gospel. Kate writes, "I know where Palm Sunday falls in the story of our God. Jesus is on a donkey trudging into Jerusalem, people waving their arms in the air,

tattered coats thrown down before the One who marches toward His death. It is a celebration. It is a funeral procession. Holding Zach (my son) in my arms, fifteen days from my next CAT scan, I wish I knew the difference."¹

This paragraph caught my attention because Palm Sunday is indeed a *celebration*. There's a sense of excitement in the air. People lay their coats and cloaks down on the ground to make a path. There's waving of branches, much like we would wave team pennants to mark a sports win. People are happy and singing and having a good time. They are cheering and rejoicing at the coming of Jesus, who they believe is the promised One of God, the Messiah, the one who they hope will overturn the Roman occupation. There is a sense of hope and optimism together with festivity.

And yet, there is more going on here than simply celebration. Jan Richardson writes: "After sending for the colt. After the procession. After the palms. After the cloak-strewn road. After the hosannas. After blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

I think Jesus saw and experienced two things, in that time of silence in the temple, after the celebratory parade was over. First, I believe he *saw his own story and connection with the temple*. I can imagine that he perhaps saw his parents, "Mary and Joseph, coming out of the shadows, carrying their infant son. Perhaps he sees Simeon gathering his young self into his arms, singing about salvation and a light for revelation, joined by the old prophet Anna, who raises her voice in praise. Perhaps Jesus sees again the twelve-year-old who conversed with the temple teachers, and the tempter who tried to lure him to fling himself from the pinnacle of this place. Perhaps a woman, once trapped and terrified, stands before him again, this time with the light of forgiveness and healing shining through her eyes."²

Beyond his own story, the temple held many other memories for Jesus – people he had healed, folks he had talked to. Which leads me to the second thing I believe Jesus saw and experienced in the temple, in that silence after the Palm parade – the knowledge of why he had come, a reminder of the ministry of love to which he was called and the God who sent him, and that for him, the palm procession was in fact for *his own funeral*.

We don't tend to think of funeral processions as being joyful events, usually because they are not. Most of us, if we have experienced one, would likely describe it as a quiet, solemn, dignified affair designed to pay tribute to someone we have loved. And yet, for Jesus, I believe Kate Bowler is correct in describing Palm Sunday as *a funeral procession* – Jesus knows what the disciples and his followers do not, as they enter Jerusalem: that this is the last week of his life, that he is entering Jerusalem to go head to head against the authorities, and that it will cost him his life. He rides a donkey, rather than a horse as a military leader would do. And in doing so, Jesus teaches us again about humility, about love, and about the true meaning of the messiah – that he is the one who prepares the world for the peace-filled reign of God with an attitude of humility. And he will die a cruel death on a cross to usher that reign in.

Palm Sunday calls us to follow Jesus, even to his death. May it be so! Amen

¹ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason: and Other Lies I've Loved*. Random House Publishing, 2018. Page 112.

² *Ibid.*