

Worship at Home for March 28, 2021  
Palm Sunday

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Prayer

Palm strips waving, or hands in the air,  
help us to savour the celebration as we enter into  
our time of private worship, O God.

Palm strips folded into crosses, or hands folded in our laps,  
help us to savour your presence, O God.

Amen

Opening Music: "Hosanna Loud Hosanna"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8VgZTC0FSo>

Opening Prayer

Holy God, help us to celebrate Jesus as those long ago parade-goers did –  
with shouts of joy, with excitement, with certainty.

Help us to welcome Jesus as if he were riding right into our hearts and lives.

Lead us to joy today, because we do know that the road through  
this holiest week will also contain fear, rejection, betrayal, desperation and darkness.

Loving God, lead us to a joy that will sustain us until the light of Easter morning  
can warm our hearts again. Amen

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

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.

Reflection Hannah's story

*This reflection is the same as the one shared in our 'A Bite from the Apple' podcast for Palm Sunday.*

Here we are – at another Palm Sunday, another year into pandemic restrictions. We want to be gathering and waving palms together, we want to be singing and marching into or around our sanctuary in joyful celebration. We know we cannot – we know that it is too dangerous to the health of our entire community to gather in this way. We are fortunate that the dangers are identified, and that most of us have an understanding of why we remain separate, and some hope that we will once again be together. This is in contrast to the crowds that gathered as Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem. Yes, they recognized Jesus as the blessed one, come in God's name. Yes, they shouted and laid their cloaks on the ground, as if welcoming a king. Yes, they were excited and perhaps a little out of control – like crowds can become if they are excited and celebrating. But surely some had listened to what Jesus had been teaching, surely some of them knew the dangers of gathering and celebrating in this way?

And so we come to the story of a possible disciple, Hannah. Hannah had been one of the women not just following Jesus, but helping to support him and the disciples in their ministry. Hannah was the eldest daughter of a wealthy tax collector, and she had returned to her widowed father's household after her husband's death had left her childless. Her father was happy to have her running his household, but he had just taken a new wife, whose right it was to take over the domestic affairs, and so Jesus' arrival in her town of Magdala seemed to have some at the perfect time. After seeing him miraculously heal her dear friend Mary, who had been severely ill and suffering, she decided she would join her friend in this journey of faith and sometimes frustration!

They spent hours listening to Jesus as they served him and the disciples their evening meals. He was never too busy to answer their questions, never too tired to heal just one more sick child or blind beggar. Hannah had come to know in her heart and mind that Jesus was the Messiah – God's own chosen one, the very presence of God with them as they walked the dusty roads, or sat with him in

prayer on a mountaintop, or watched him teach on the lake shore. Hannah listened to every word, every expression, and so she also knew that the return to Jerusalem was both very important to Jesus, and very dangerous for him – and perhaps for all of them.

She listened as Jesus sent the two to fetch the donkey – she understood that this humble yet brave man would enter the city riding not the stallion of the warrior, but the beast of burden well known to the common folk. She was afraid – afraid of the excited crowds gathering for Passover and ready to create a stir. She was afraid for Jesus – would the crowds turn on him? Would the city guards arrest him before he could even enter the gates? Would he really have to go through suffering, as he had described to them so many times? She was afraid of being swept up in the excitement and forgetting herself.

As she followed that donkey she could hear a murmuring ahead, and her heart beat faster as her feet drew her onward. She watched as the crowds – so unexpectedly – began to throw their cloaks to make a royal carpet, and lay palm branches to soften the way. She could hear them – no longer a murmur – shouting words she recognized from scripture – Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest heaven! She found herself beginning to shout as well – caught up in the moment, caught up in joy and her fears falling from her heart like the cloaks falling in Jesus' path. They were so close to the gate, the crowds still calling out, the palm branches and cloth still forming the path. Hannah watched her friends' faces – bright with smiles and shining with delight at the reception their teacher, their Messiah, was receiving. She hurried to walk into the city with Mary and Salome and Debra – when she felt a hand on her arm. She turned and saw the biggest Roman soldier she had ever encountered holding her by the sleeve. She froze, looking up into his eyes shaded by his centurion's helmet. As her feet stopped – she thought her heart might stop as well, and all those fears that had been lifted returned. Why had they come? Why had SHE come – only to be stopped by a guard – and perhaps to lose her freedom. "That man, on the donkey, is that Jesus of Nazareth – the one who heals?" asked the soldier. She was afraid to answer – afraid of betraying Jesus – he was SO close to the gate now – "Woman" the soldier repeated, is that man the healer Jesus? The crowds do not shout his name."

Taking a deep breath, hoping to perhaps distract the soldier while Jesus made his way safely through the gate, she answered – "Sir, I have seen this one heal, and teach, and care for his companions and those who follow him. I have heard him speak as though God was at his shoulder; I have seen him weep with his friends, I have heard him speak like a prophet and laugh until his eyes were full of tears. I have seen him tenderly hold a child, and ferociously command demons." Standing as tall as she could, glancing beyond the soldier's bulk to see Jesus enter the city gate, she declared – "He is Jesus of Nazareth, he is God's own Chosen One, he is the Messiah – and yes – he is a healer of hearts and bodies and spirits!" A smile could be seen spreading across the centurion's face – an honest and open face despite the man's size. "He healed the servant of my friend Marcellus, who lives near Capernaum. Marcellus spoke often of Jesus, the healer, and now I have seen him for myself. Thank you for telling me who he really is. I hope the city is kind to him, as kind as he was to my friend." And the soldier marched away – not arresting her, not following Jesus, not signaling to other guards to bother anyone.

Hannah walked slowly now toward the gate, pondering how special Jesus was, that a Roman soldier would be curious to see him not for any political reason, but because he had been kind. Her heart was lifted, and filled with anticipation as she followed Jesus into the city – perhaps there really was nothing to fear, perhaps everyone would see Jesus as this man did – just as she did - she could only hope.

Music: "Blessed is He Who Comes in the name of the Lord"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REf0vbA5A7k>

### Prayers of the People

Guiding God, in Jesus you were part of the parade  
as he triumphantly entered Jerusalem.

We are grateful that you accompany us in all our walks of life -  
in joyful parades and sorrowful processions,  
in peaceful meanderings and purposeful marches.

We pray today for those people who walk with us –  
our families holding our hands and hearts,  
our friends holding our best interests,  
our faith community holding us in prayer.

We pray for people who walk with us in happy times,  
and for those who support our journeys when we are  
frightened or anxious or unsure of the path forward.

We pray for those who feel as though they walk alone –  
the homeless, the financially insecure, the racialized,  
the victims of cruelty and violence,  
the ill in body, mind, or spirit.

Lead us into the story of the coming week -  
a walk of pain and sorrow,  
a journey of defeat and victory,  
a march through humiliation and exaltation,  
death and resurrection.

Be with us now, as we follow you in joy and in sorrow -  
the way of the cross,  
in the footsteps of Jesus.  
Amen

Closing music: "Stay With Me"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OHPoVhwgnM>

### Blessing

Merciful God, we now enter Holy Week  
and some of us will gather virtually throughout this time  
from our houses, and in prayer.

Turn our hearts and our imaginations to ancient Jerusalem,  
to the story of life, love, death, and resurrection that is our faith heritage.

Bring to us an understanding of your *new* Jerusalem,  
that kingdom of peace and justice for all.

And as we walk toward the dawning of Easter Day, stay with us,  
and send your Spirit to guide us, as we follow the footsteps of your Beloved One. Amen