

*Common Worship in Separate Places
For the people of Elmwood Avenue Presbyterian Church
London, Ontario
and their friends*

*The 6th Sunday in Lent
(Palm Sunday)
28 March 2021*

To cross the threshold into worship, light a candle and keep a moment of silence.

Opening Words

L: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

P: Hosanna in the highest.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of glory, as we enter this Holy Week, turn our hearts to Jerusalem. Lord Jesus Christ, as you entered that Holy City long ago, enter our hearts this day. Holy Spirit of God, as people cried 'Hosanna' to bless his coming, help us to bless and praise the Lord. Glory be to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Merciful One, we confess our fear and helplessness. Our days dissolve like smoke, and our hearts wither like the grass. Our minds are restless. We lie awake, sleepless with worry. Have we denied you? Have we betrayed you by what we have done and left undone? Do not hide your face from us in the time of our distress. Restore our hope, renew our faith, and assure our hearts with your mercy.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

P: Christ, have mercy upon us.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Everlasting God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son to take our nature and to suffer death upon the cross. In your mercy, help us to share in his allegiance to your will and in the glory of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." May God grant us pardon, true repentance, and bring us to eternal life.

P: May the peace of Christ be with us all.

Prayer for Illumination Holy Wisdom, prepare our hearts to receive your Word. Silence within us any voice but your own, that, by hearing, we may know your will and trust in your truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29 (*Thanksgiving for Victory*)

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
 his mercy endures for ever.
 Let Israel now proclaim,
 'His mercy endures for ever.'
 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
 that I may enter and give thanks to the Lord.
 This is the gate of the Lord;
 the righteous shall enter through it.
 I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me
 and have become my salvation.
 The stone which the builders rejected
 has become the chief cornerstone.
 This is the Lord's doing,
 and it is marvellous in our eyes.
 This is the day that the Lord has made;
 we will rejoice and be glad in it.
 Come, O Lord, and save us we pray.
 Come, Lord, send us now prosperity.
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;
 we bless you from the house of the Lord.
 The Lord is God; he has given us light;
 link the pilgrims with cords
 right to the horns of the altar.
 You are my God and I will thank you;
 you are my God and I will exalt you.
 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
 his mercy endures for ever.

(Said together) **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen**

A Reading for the Day

St Mark 11: 1-11 (*Jesus enters Jerusalem*)

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus 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.

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St Mark 11:9 "*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*"

What do a 'Black Lives Matter' rally, a gaggle of environmentalists blocking a logging road, and the 'Occupy Movement' all have in common? They make some people very angry.

Protestors are, by definition, unhappy campers. They're *against* something. They gather up a bit of power and use it to shout 'no' to something. But they're never '*in* power'. If they were, *they'd* be running things, *their* will would be done, and there'd be nothing left for them to protest.

Jesus' path through the world was a protest movement. God had gathered him into this calling. He used his strength to say 'no' to something. But his 'no' was all for the sake of a much larger 'yes'. He called it the 'Kingdom of God'.

We know Jesus made three grand gestures in the last week of his earthly life. First, he rode into the city on a donkey. Was he poking fun of the pompous parades of those in power? Was he making a show of usurping them, acting as if *he* were their new King? Some shouted 'Hosanna', but those in power watched from afar and shook their heads with scorn. "Who does he think *he* is? *We* run things here."

Then he marched on the city's nerve centre, the Temple, where he kicked over the tables of the moneychangers. It was a parable without words. It said 'no' to the old order. It said 'yes' to a new way to live in the unfettered presence of God.

Finally, he ate a Last Supper with his friends. He made the bread and cup speak of himself. "This Bread is my Body. I'm giving it for you," he said. "Keep on doing this in Remembrance of me. Keep on gathering around the Truth that's alive in me, the Truth at work in what I'm about to do."

These were his last gestures as a free man. A new King, a new Order, a New Banquet. How could this not be Good News?

Yet there's a straight line, direct and sure, between these 'protests' and his Good Friday death. Anyone who tries to tell people that the life they've mastered is misguided, and their rule over others is cruel, is in for some big trouble. When Jesus said, "Love you enemies," he didn't mean "Don't make any." He *did* make enemies. He still does. He wasn't stripped and whipped and crucified because he was a friendly, harmless fellow who asked us, timidly and politely, to do our best to be 'nice' and to try and get along. Who'd assassinate Mr. Dressup?

But Mr. Dressup never rode in a mock parade, never marched on the Temple, never hosted a banquet of radical sharing. Jesus did. Those in power viewed his 'protests' as one big act of sedition. He'd shouted a rude 'no' right in their faces. They couldn't hear the larger 'yes' spoken within these protests.

So, they killed him. That's the fourth grand gesture that happened in the last week of his life. But it's impossible to nail yourself to a cross. This one had to be done *to* him. It was.

Do you think if Jesus entered the cities of our land today things would be all that different? Moneychangers still run things, don't they? Is the human family a banquet of sharing? No, the poor are made poorer by those who have wealth. Affluence stands on Poverty's neck and sneers. "Get up, lazybones! Why can't you stand on your own two feet? But here's a crumb from my table. Now, *tell me I'm generous! Thank me for it!*"

Let's not be naïve. This is vicious and unjust. It's happening here and it's happening now. "Some people are born on third base," Jesse Jackson once said. "But they act as if they've hit a triple."

The Gospel is this: our 'no' to God becomes the very vehicle for God's 'yes' to us.

Jesus was a threat and he faced a threat. But he faced it not by running away, nor by fighting back, but by letting it have its way with him. In a Garden, at night, when his

courage hung by a thread, he opened his soul to the gathering dark and called it 'Father'.

The truth incarnate in Jesus was utterly naked in that moment. Truth can't clothe itself in falsehood and still be truth. It must maintain its extraordinary strength by being extraordinarily *vulnerable*. Truth's only weapon is love. Truth's only armour is its ultimate undeniability.

The next day the powers-that-be nailed Jesus to the cross. His anguish in those hours was the same kind of anguish you can find in any hospital ward, nursing home, homeless shelter, addiction clinic, refugee camp, or prison cell. It's found in affluent mansions where love has left, in depressed souls where hope has died, and in anxious minds where fear grows.

Even so, as he shared our human anguish, Jesus's last words (according to St Luke) were these: 'Father, into thy hands I commit my Spirit.'

And on the third day, God said 'yes' to him.

One day we too shall say: 'Into thy hands I commit my spirit' and breathe our last breath. The hands into which we shall fall when we descend in death are hands moved by love. They're just like our hands except they're scarred from the marks of iron nails.

Good Friday is God's grand protest and Easter God's consummate gesture: God's 'yes' to our 'no'. We're made and saved by Divine Love. That's where the real power lies. "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

Prayers of Intercession

Holy One, we gather the wounds of the Church and the World, the needs of our neighbours and of our own selves. We hold them all in our hearts before you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the whole Church of Jesus Christ. We remember with joy the people of Elmwood Avenue Church. Keep us close to each other within the body of your Son Jesus Christ. Let us not give up on your Church. Keep us from laziness in our worship of you. Make us more curious to seek the deeper meaning of our faith, and to mature in it. Then hasten the day when we return to your sanctuary to sing in one voice our Common Prayer to you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Judge of all nations, you made us for salvation not destruction. Enable people of every race and nation to receive each other as sisters and brothers who bear your image. Let your justice make demands upon us. Place your peace in every human heart.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Loving Lord, you promise strength when we are weary. Give us courage for whatever lies ahead of us. Fill us with strength to endure what must be faced. Bless those who are dying from any kind of illness or trauma. Into your strong hands we commit them all.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for physicians and nurses, for medical technicians and staff, for hospital administrators and equipment suppliers, psychologists and social workers. Keep their hearts from flagging, their minds from fatigue, and their bodies from illness. Bless those who clean up our messes, deliver our supplies, and repair what is damaged. Free our own hearts from selfish whining in the face of small hardships.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who suffer in mind and spirit, cast down by care and sorrow. We pray for those who have given up on you, who deny your existence and have turned their back on you. Stay near them through their soul's dark night.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

With hearts full of love for those who have gone before us, we remember the whole Communion of Saints and your astonishing promise of resurrection to eternal life...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*...

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God of life, your steadfast love endures forever. Open our hearts to the One who comes to us so humbly. Then open before us the gates of the City not made with human hands, where we shall find a home forever, and Christ is all in all.

As our Saviour has taught, so we pray:

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever. Amen

Benediction

(Said together) **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen**