



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Passion / Palm Sunday

March 28, 2021

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three

This week, the center of the church's year, is one of striking contrasts: Jesus rides into Jerusalem surrounded by shouts of glory, only to be left alone to die on the cross, abandoned by even his closest friends. Mark's gospel presents Jesus in his complete human vulnerability: agitated, grieved, scared, forsaken. Though we lament Christ's suffering and all human suffering, we also expect God's salvation: in the wine and bread, Jesus promises that his death will mark a new covenant with all people. We enter this holy week thirsty for the completion of God's astonishing work.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ACCLAMATION (p. 256)

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL: Mark 11:1-11

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, [Jesus] sent two of his disciples ²and 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. ³If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹¹Then 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.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

BLESSING OF PALMS (p. 256)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

We praise you, O God,
for redeeming the world through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Today he entered the holy city in triumph

and was proclaimed messiah and king

by those who spread garments and branches along his way.

Bless these branches and assorted greenery that we have in remembrance of that day.

Grant us grace to follow our Lord in the way of the cross,

so that, joined to his death and resurrection,

we may enter into life with you;

through the same Jesus Christ,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and forever.

Amen.

PROCESSION All Glory, Laud, and Honor (#344)

PRAYER OF THE DAY (p. 257)

Blessed is he, the Christ, who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

As we now enter into the contemplation of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and meditate on the salvation of the world through his sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection, let us pray.

God of resurrection and new life, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus to take on our nature and through his suffering, to raise us into life. In your mercy, help us in our humble obedience and loving service, that we be lifted up in a resurrection like Christ's and dwell with you forever, eternal creator God, Sovereign, Saviour, and Spirit.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:4-9a

A reading from Isaiah.

The image of the servant of God is one of the notable motifs in the book of Isaiah. Today's reading describes the mission of the servant, whom early Christians associated with Jesus. Like Jesus, the servant does not strike back at his detractors but trusts in God's steadfast love.

⁴The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens—
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.
⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.
⁶I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.
⁷The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
⁸he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
^{9a}It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 31:9-16

⁹Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble;
my eye is consumed with sorrow, and also my throat and my belly.
¹⁰**For my life is wasted with grief, and my years with sighing;
my strength fails me because of affliction, and my bones are consumed.**
¹¹I am the scorn of all my enemies, a disgrace to my neighbors, a dismay to my acquaintances;
when they see me in the street they avoid me.
¹²**Like the dead I am forgotten, out of mind;
I am as useless as a broken pot.**
¹³For I have heard the whispering of the crowd; fear is all around;
they put their heads together against me; they plot to take my life.
¹⁴**But as for me, I have trusted in you, O LORD.
I have said, "You are my God.**
¹⁵My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.
¹⁶**Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love."**

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:5-11

A reading from Philippians.

Christ did not act to attain status and glory but was obedient to God even to the point of death. Following Christ's example, we do not seek personal status or glory but care for others as God cared for us in Christ's death.

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: Mark 15:1-39

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The passion story in Mark's gospel presents Jesus as one who dies abandoned by all. He shows himself to be the true Son of God by giving his life for those who have forsaken him.

¹As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ²Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." ³Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

⁶Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. ⁷Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. ⁸So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. ¹²Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³They shouted back, "Crucify him!" ¹⁴Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" ¹⁵So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. ²²Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

²⁵It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁸Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ²⁹save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³⁰³¹In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³²Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

³³When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take

him down.”³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Holy God, you are the source of all life. As your Word speaks to us this day, may the same mind be in us that was in Christ which humbles us for service, accepts us into your kingdom, and loves us into salvation, through his death and resurrection. **Amen.**

Poor Palm Sunday. I think you might know what I’m talking about. Back in the day, at least when I was a kid, Palm Sunday was a huge to do. It landed on the week before Easter and it was one of my favourite Sundays of the year, next to Christmas (if Christmas landed on a Sunday) and my birthday (if my birthday landed on a Sunday). I remember getting these giant palms to wave around on Palm Sunday. We’d march and dance around the sanctuary. And afterwards, my friends and I would have sword fights with whatever palms that weren’t already taken away from us.

But these days? These days, we don’t get huge palms anymore because honestly they’re kind of expensive. These days, we still go around the sanctuary (when we’re here in person that is), but it’s a lot less dance and a lot more slow, laboured stroll. These days the passion narrative takes over that week before Easter. I get it though, I mean the story of the crucifixion is fundamental to our faith and spiritual development, so it has to be told on a Sunday to ensure that those who didn’t bother coming to the Good Friday service would hear about the death before celebrating the resurrection. But, since we need the Palm Sunday story as well, it effectively became Palm/Passion Sunday.

Truth be told though, I actually prefer the story of the triumphal entry over the story of the shameful crucifixion. And I know, it’s the same old, uninteresting story about a guy on a donkey walking on some leaves and jackets. Nothing really exciting, unless the donkey could talk or turns out to be a transforming robot donkey, which it doesn’t. But I like it more because it’s joyful. It’s a story of welcome. And it shows how the people had faith and hope in the Messiah.

But as I was looking at the Palm Sunday reading this year, I noticed something, namely the last verse of the passage, which reads, “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.” Not a very interesting verse at first glance, but I assure you, it’s a good one. However not for reasons that you might think, but mostly because of this: **play vid

I always found this scene from The Simpsons to be hilarious because Homer just obviously pulls Matthew 21:17 randomly out of his head, not knowing at all what it says, but Reverend Lovejoy somehow knew what turned out to be a very obscure and mundane verse by heart. But that verse, although from the gospel according to Matthew, is talking about this same incident that we get today in Mark. And so it caught my attention because every time I heard “Bethany” in the past 30 years I would think of that scene from the Simpsons.

But as I ponder that verse (because I can't get it out of my head), there are two things that I wonder about. First, why Bethany? Why there? What was so special about it? Bethany isn't mentioned much in the bible, not like Jerusalem, Nazareth, or even Samaria. But you'll find that every time it is mentioned, something big is going down and the writers make sure to call it by name.

Bethany is where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived and where Lazarus eventually was risen from the dead. Bethany is where Mary and/or an unnamed woman poured an inordinate amount of perfume on Jesus' feet. Bethany is a place of welcome, accepting Jesus to lodge there without question, and where he found good friends. It's where he went for a good home cooked meal, to be in community with loved ones, and be reminded that what he was doing was making a difference.

At least, that's what I gather from the few stories we get of the place. It is, after all, where Jesus is finally lifted up into heaven, leaving his ministry in the hands of his disciples and us. Clearly it's an important location to Jesus and so that's why Bethany in this verse.

The second thing I'm wondering is, what did Jesus see when he looked around and decided to go back to Bethany? He just came from there, for crying out loud. He actually just left Bethany to get that non-talking, non-transforming robot donkey and rode that into the city. He got there, looked around, and went right back to Bethany. Why? Did he see that he arrived too late in the day and he really should have entered the city triumphantly in the morning instead, so he'll be back tomorrow? Did he realise that he actually couldn't see anything because he forgot his glasses back at Simon the leper's house? Or did he see the state of the big city and second guess the value of his mission? Did he see the corruption, the greed, the power mongering in the temple, and felt like maybe these people aren't worth saving? Did he come face to face with the evil that he would go up against, and just wanted one last reminder of why he was facing it in the first place?

The truth is, I don't know. And probably no one ever would. But thinking about the contrast between Bethany and Jerusalem as we read about them today, does paint a picture of just how Jesus' journey went, doesn't it? On the one hand you have a place that is welcoming, accepting, and live-giving. And on the other, you have a place that is ready to turn their back on you, unwilling to see their own shortcomings, and eventually kills those whom they just doesn't like.

Where would you rather be? On your journey to the cross, do you want to be surrounded and supported by loved ones or spat on and mocked by those who want you dead? What would you rather see? The joy and comradery of community or an angry mob calling for your blood? Who would you rather save? Those who appreciate you for all that you do or those who couldn't wait for you to suffer and die?

Not a tough choice for us, really. We all have our Bethany vs. Jerusalem dichotomies, and we'd probably choose Bethany more often than not. But Jesus reminds us through his actions that he chose Bethany too. But also, he chose Jerusalem. He chose both. He chose all. He chose to love so much that he stretched his arms out and died.

But (spoiler alert) he doesn't stay that way. In the face of the brokenness, pain, and death, Jesus is made alive. In spite of the corruption, the selfishness, and the inability to see one's

own wrongs, Jesus forgives. Even in the anger, hatred, and evil, Jesus continues to choose to love and bless all people with the unending salvation graciously given by God.

That isn't to say that we wouldn't prefer a Bethany over a Jerusalem, a Palm Sunday over a Passion Sunday, or... as it were... life over death. But it is to say that we shouldn't forget that we are part of that Jerusalem mentality too, we sometimes gravitate to the Passion over the Palms, we are also the ones who shook our fists in anger and demanded someone to be crucified. Maybe not crucify Jesus per se, but we demand the crucifixion of certain ideals, certain ways of life, perhaps even certain people (*cough* politicians *cough* you know who I mean).

So let's not look at Pilate as the one who is to blame for the state of Jerusalem. Let's not point our fingers at the religious leaders and authorities keeping the people so misguided in their spirituality. Let's not even call out the crowds for their jeers and insults. But let's recognise that each one of us has it in us to have driven those nails in the hands and feet of Jesus.

And yet... we too are still forgiven.

Not so we can do it again and again, but so we can know the extent of God's grace and mercy, so we can see how God's salvation is bigger and stronger than any kind of evil, so we can feel the light of God shining on us all with steadfast love forever. See, we might very easily choose Bethany over Jerusalem, a Palm Sunday over a Passion Sunday, or life over death, but God chooses them all and reveals that we cannot have one without the other and brings us all together as one body, one kingdom, under one Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

As we move into this holiest of weeks that leads us into Easter, may we rely on the hope of the resurrection, that even in the face of death and evil, we might know God's glory and steadfast love forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Lamb of God: Your Only Son (#336)

CREED

With all those gathered around the cross this day, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Called to follow Christ into the way of life, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, “save us, O God,” and you are invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Save us, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have mercy on us when we are in trouble and you lift us up into redemption and salvation. Help us to recognize our shortcomings and failings and give us strength to submit them to you for forgiveness and healing. Save us, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, our time is in your hand, and you rescue us and lead us into safety. Expand our ministry and welcome to all people who are in need of your restoration, spreading your love and grace to all the world. Especially we pray for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Living Faith Lutheran Church in Sechelt and their interim pastor Richard Hergesheimer; and Lord of Life Mission in Sandspit and their interim pastor Jim Whaley. Save us, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, our trust is in you for you are our God and you created this wondrous planet for us to live in. May our care for all that you have made that you have entrusted to us be pleasing to you, as we continue with consideration of the wellbeing of the future generations. Save us, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, there is fear in the world and nations plot against nations. Instill in all world leaders and politicians your wisdom and grace, that their judgments policies be for the good of all. We pray for Solyana Amanuel, and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile and their children, that they all be able to arrive into our country and safety soon. Save us, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, in our grief and afflictions we sometimes feel like we are forgotten and out of mind. Remind us all that you do not forget us, but you hold us in your loving arms of healing and wholeness forever. Especially we pray for Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Beulah; Paula; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; those who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... Save us, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your face shines upon us and you save us with your steadfast love, joining us with you and all the saints forever. May our connection to you and them always inform us in our faith and service. Save us, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your grace and mercy, found in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERATORY HYMN: Here Is Bread (#483)

OFFERING PRAYER

Holy God, we give thanks for your saving love made known in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Bless this food before us, that they be symbols of this love and reminders of your grace, through Jesus our brother and friend.

Amen.

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ,
whose suffering and death gave salvation to all,
and joins us with all the choirs of angels,
the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 144)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord, your mercy is shown to us in our times of trouble, sorrow, and grief, and you strengthen us in our times of affliction. In our brokenness, we feel the sting of death and the fear of shame. But you have shown us that you are faithful and trustworthy. As our God, our time is in your hand and you rescue us from all that oppresses us and persecutes us through the life and ministry of Jesus, your Son, sent to us to teach, to serve, and to love.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends, took some bread, and with a thankful heart he broke and shared it saying, "take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and shared that saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is though this food shared with us that God's face shines on us, saving us with steadfast love even as we proclaim this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

In Christ's death we see our guilt. In Christ's rising we see your grace. In Christ's promised return we see our hope, knowing that we be not alone, but surrounded by the cloud of witnesses for all that you are and all that you do. So all honour and glory belong to you, O God, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Brought to the foot of the cross by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see that God is steadfast grace and mercy.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 146)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Compassionate God, you have fed us and nourished us with your Word and love. Sustain us as we enter this holiest of weeks, looking ahead to the redemptive resurrection of Christ, that we be strengthened for your service and to proclamation your grace and mercy to the world, through Jesus our Saviour and Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the Creator who defeats our evil,
the Christ who bears our pain,
and the Counsellor who lives with us forever,
bless you with a zeal for justice,
a humility for forgiveness,
and a passion for peace,
now and always.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Soon and Very Soon (#439)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, love and serve with the humility of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

From sundaysandseasons.com.

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