

An introductory message from the Chair of Council

Hello One and All,

Just following this message you will find a beautiful worship service that Rev. Dr. Karen Boivin has prepared for this coming Palm Sunday (April 5). We were planning on taping this service and making it available on our website, as well as Facebook, however, I just received word from her husband this morning that Rev. Karen awoke with a stomach ailment. She graciously shares her work with us. I know that we all wish her a speedy recovery and I know that we all appreciate the thought and effort she has put into this worship service. It our hope to celebrate Easter Sunday – on-line together!

This Sunday, you can prepare your own little “home worship” service. You are invited to have a candle ready to serve as your Christ candle; and you are encouraged to make Palm Branches prior to setting up your own home service.

As you are aware restrictions announced by the Ontario government on March 25, 2020, require the closure of all, but essential workplaces, during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time only the custodian or a designated staff person may enter to check heat and water or pick up mail and cheques. Newspapers are still listed as an essential service, so the Messenger staff will also be in the building (on a minimal basis). In keeping with this directive our Council has decided that the building will be closed to all non-essential persons and activities. ***This does not mean that our church activities and our fellowship have gone away.*** Lisa will be working from home to ensure that we maintain effective communication and are able to respond to individual needs. The Book Club plans on meeting on April 7, via Zoom, to discuss their latest book “From the Ashes”. Our Meditation group is meeting in the same format. As we continue to become more familiar with Zoom we find more ways to connect with everyone electronically. Many of us are reaching out by phone or email to ensure that our members feel supported.

The church telephone and emails are monitored daily. If you need assistance or have question, I encourage you to call the church office at 613-692-4576 or email admin@manotickunitedchurch.com and Lisa can direct your call accordingly. Rev. Dr. Karen Boivin will continue to lead us in worship and Rev. Ed Gratton is also most helpful as he continues to be our Pastoral Supervisor.

There is no doubt that these are challenging times, however, it is reassuring to know that we have each other as we pray for all those who suffer from this dreadful virus.

Please take good care,

Catherine McVie

Chair of Council



Words of Welcome/Announcements:

Welcome members and visitors to Manotick United Church's Palm Sunday Service.

It is wonderful that you have decided to join us. Many thanks to everyone who has worked hard so that we can be worshipping together during Holy Week. I wish you all the peace of Christ in this challenging time.

Lighting our Christ Candles at Home:

Let us begin by lighting our Christ candles in our homes sharing these words together:

We light our candles in gratitude

that the light of Christ continues to shine in the darkness

and the darkness does not overcome it.

Introduction:

After all that has gone on in the past few weeks it may seem odd to have our first service online be as celebratory as Palm Sunday. Two popular hymns in Voices United, because they are upbeat, are by the late Argentinian pastor and hymn writer Pablo Sosa: Behold How Pleasant (Miren que Bueno) and Heaven is Singing for Joy. At a conference I attended on Global Music he was asked why he wrote, and his people sang, such uplifting music despite experiencing considerable oppression. He answered, "You cannot liberate if you cannot celebrate." To seek out and celebrate God's grace during times of trial gives us hope and energizes us for what needs to be done.

So let us call one another to join the Palm Sunday Parade and turn our prayers to God sharing Psalm 118. And if you have made Palm branches I invite you to wave them from now to the end of our hymn.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer: Psalm 118 (vs. 19-29)¹

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

This is the gate of God, through it the righteous shall enter.

I thank you for you have answered me, you have become my salvation,

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

This is God's doing, marvelous in our eyes.

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

Save us, O God, we pray,

God we pray, give us success.

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

We bless you from the house of God.

God our God, has given us light,

With palm branches in hand let us march to the altar.

You are my God, and I will thank you, you are my God, and I will extol you. Amen.

HYMN: Hosanna, Loud Hosanna <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FPydZdCL4c>

¹ Voices United Psalm 118, Etobicoke: The United Church Publishing House, 1996), pg. 837.

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

**From Olivet they followed 'mid an exultant crowd,
the victor palm branch waving, and chanting clear and loud,
the Lord of earth and heaven rode on in lowly state,
nor scorned that little children should on his bidding wait.**

**“Hosanna in the highest!”
That ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer,
the Lord of heaven our King.
O may we ever praise him
with heart and life and voice,
and in his blissful presence eternally rejoice!**

Children's Time:

Welcome to all the children worshipping with us today. It has probably been a very different week or two for you with school closed, maybe parents working at home, and not going out to play with friends or shop. I hope you are discovering lots of fun new games and things to learn. I hope you are doing well and that you are talking with your parents, and with God in prayer, about anything that is bothering you.

In the time of Jesus, Jewish people were waiting for God to send them a Messiah, a person they believed God would send to lead them to the best possible life. As part of their worship they sometimes expressed their hope for this person to come by waving branches and shouting “Hosanna”; which meant “Save us!” Why don't we try shouting that word, and if you cut a palm branch out of paper wave it in the air. Let's try, “Hosanna! Hosanna!”

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey during Passover Festival word went around that he might be the Messiah. So people ran out and gathered up branches and waved them and shouted “Hosanna!” Let's pretend we are greeting Jesus. “Hosanna!” “Hosanna!”

Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the one sent by God to save us by letting us know how much God loves us and by showing us how to live our best lives, with each other, with God and on our planet. He continues to show us through his teachings that we read in the Bible and by sending us the Spirit to guide us. Everyone has some things they would like to see get better. Can you think of some things you'd like to be better? You think about those things for a minute. Ok let's shout, “Hosanna! Hosanna!”

Scriptures: Mark 11: 1-11 (New International Version)

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them,

“Go to the village ahead of you and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?”

They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the ground, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Sermon: *Grace is Sufficient*

Imagine if Jesus and his disciples came into Manotick *this* Sunday. Riding down Main Street, and finding it so quiet, Jesus would think the Passover celebrations had already started without them somewhere else! And what if someone, looking out their window, saw Jesus and his party and started spreading the news of his arrival online. Given the fears COVID-19 has raised, and our desire to see the back of this virus, would people break their isolation and flock to Jesus? Would they come looking for healing; the faithful who already know him; and maybe even people who have just heard some of the miracle stories?

On the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem, Jews from all over were coming into the city to celebrate the Passover Festival. They couldn't wait to celebrate the story of the Exodus and how God, working through Moses' leadership, had led their people out of slavery in Egypt, guided them through forty years in the desert, and eventually brought them to freedom in the Promised land. It's easy to imagine the connections they were making between the story of the Exodus and the tyranny they themselves were experiencing under Roman occupation. This wasn't just a time of remembrance but also a way to recharge their batteries to sustain themselves under Roman rule and would hopefully be a source of wisdom and strength to eventually free themselves from their oppressors. When they cried “Hosanna” (Save us!) during the festival it was both a statement of surety based on the many times in their history that their people had experienced God's saving grace; and also a cry of hope for the resolution of their present situation. It's no wonder then at the excitement caused by Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Some were saying he was the long promised Messiah; the savior anointed by God.

Their excitement, however, didn't last out the week. The crowd started to fade away when Jesus didn't turn out to be the Messiah they expected. He didn't lead a revolt. There were no miracles to put an end to Roman oppression. Jesus seemed more concerned about the hearts of individuals and the relationship they had with each other; independent of whether they were Jewish or Roman. Followers started falling away, including some of his close friends, when the threat of knowing him seemed to outweigh the benefits received. Unfortunately for most of them it would only be after his death when they came to see and celebrate the grace of God experienced in his presence and teachings and continued to be poured out through his Spirit. Yes, the Romans were still in power, which was a terrible thing, but they now had a sense that something even bigger was going on, something bigger than the reality before them. Like the woman who knew that just touching Jesus' hem would be life changing they realized the grace they experienced was just the edge of the saving grace of God that was unfolding through Christ.

COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on our world. Most tragic is the many lives it has taken around the world. Hundreds of thousands have been sick from it and almost every global citizen has been impacted by illness, economic hardship, and considerable disruptions of life. Some will ask how a loving God could let this happen. If you become a surveyor of grace, however, it is easier to live with the mystery of “why suffering?” because you have many memories of gifts of God's grace that sustain you and assure you that it is a loving God who is present with us in this world.

Recently a lot of people have been noticing positive changes in their own lives and their relationships that have surprisingly been brought on by physical distancing. We are afraid to share them however because we don't want to seem to downplay in anyway how tragic this pandemic has been and is for so many people. . And ... that's my reason also for offering that preface to the following comments. With lots of time now to reflect, most of us are learning a lot about ourselves, our lives and our relationships. We're coming to realize how much we used to rush, accumulate, eat on the run, drive, and miss opportunities to share quality time with our family. We're finding richness in being more present in the moment, to one another, and to nature. It's nice to think less about “stuff”, to get some exercise in the fresh air and realize how well we can cook. You may have noticed that although strangers are giving each other a wide berth, our Canadian desire not to seem impolite has us saying hello to each other way more often. Working from home has surprisingly proved to be quite effective for many

jobs and brought into the question the need for commuting. And seeing our coworkers at home without their “work uniforms” and makeup and our bosses with the same flat pack furniture that we have is humanizing us to one another and disrupting the advertising narrative that we need to buy more to catch up to everyone else. And what a blessing to see countries, some of which used to be at odds with each other, working together and helping each other. It bodes well for tackling climate change on global level. Almost all these changes have nature breathing a sigh of relief.

We have also been inspired as a society to state publicly some important truths. As some leaders have tried to put human life and economic prosperity on a scale together; the overwhelming cry has been that the value of a human life is non-negotiable; the life and well being of every person matters...no matter their age, health, location, health...no matter what. And every person is also called to act responsibly in relation to everyone else. And Christians are rediscovering how central worshipping together is to their faith causing many, like us, to be willing to jump on a steep technological learning curve. The fact that many churches have moved to online worship in the last few weeks hints that maybe Jesus has indeed ridden into town this Palm Sunday; this time on the information highway.

In person or online the Spirit of Christ is with us when two or more are gathered in Jesus’ name. This Palm Sunday we are being encouraged to embrace the positive changes we have noticed as gifts of God’s love. It’s probably best not to expect a miraculous disappearance of the COVID-19 pandemic tomorrow. Biblical witness and Christian history suggest however that as we continue to discover and celebrate grace and follow the wisdom of it, we will find sustenance for the journey and our way through this wildness time.

Over the last couple of weeks children have been leading the way in building community in the midst of physical distancing by decorating the front windows of their homes. So why not decorate our front windows today with cut out palm branches and a big “Hosanna!” banner? God will save us, through continued gifts of grace that refine our individual hearts and those of our communities for the betterment of our world. Let us pray...

Gracious God we give thanks that your Spirit has inspired your Church to find ways to gather for praise, lament, prayer, and discernment.

We bring you our grief at the many lives taken by COVID-19 and pray for the comfort of all their families and friends.

We give our thanks for the dedication and skills of health care workers and first responders.

And offer our prayers for everyone whose essential work brings them in contact with the public.

Uphold them all, strengthen, and protect them.

We pray for those who are ill with the virus, those in isolation and those awaiting test results.

It is our hope that the relief being offered to individuals and businesses here and around the world will meet their needs.

We admit that we are fearful and anxious about the virus and the social and economic upheaval it has caused.

Encourage us to reach out to others for our own sake and theirs.

May we be strengthened by the memories of your grace received when we were lost, lonely, confused or grieving.

And help us to see your Spirit at work in our world

loving, guiding, healing and assuring us.

Your grace is sufficient for us and ever more powerful in our time of weakness.

Hosanna! Amen.

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Sending Forth in Song:

Go Now in Peace

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