

## A Message from the Minister

Dear friends,

It seems like only yesterday, but at times ages ago, that I sat with the Worship committee planning for the Palm Sunday Service. Who would purchase the palms, how many palm crosses would we require?

None of us ever expected that we would not be having a service at all. However, here we are at Palm Sunday, all of us in our own homes.

The Matthew story which includes the palms and the shouting of Hosanna may be more familiar to us, but let me remind you of the story as Luke tells it.

*After Jesus has said this, he went on ahead, going to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie the colt and bring it here. If anyone asks you why you are untying it tell him the Lord needs it.*

And that, of course, is exactly what happened.

*"They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on he colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along people spread their cloaks on the road. When they came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:*

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

***Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.***

*Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."*

*"I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" Jesus replied.*

*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, **he wept over it** and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace- but now it is hidden from your eyes. (Luke 19: 28-42)*

Well, there is so much in this passage that needs to be unpacked. There are several sermons in this excerpt to be sure. That's a good thing, I guess, as I have been preaching on it for over 40 years.

I have always been intrigued by the story of the colt. How does Jesus know it will be there? Why is it needed. Does someone really give away a colt just because a few men say, "the master needs it"? And what about the crowd of disciples?

For now let's just look at the actual entrance into the city.

Why was this journey into the city of Jerusalem necessary? Surely the Pharisees had made Jesus a marked man, they were anxious to be rid of this man who was turning routine religion upside down and inside out. Why draw attention to himself?

I think we find the answer in the fact that as Jesus drew near to the city he looked down upon it and wept for the city. Crowds were not unusual for Jesus, they followed him everywhere according to the narratives. News travels fast enough in our technological time, but on an oral tradition like Jesus' time, news travelled quickly as well.

The people yearned for a quick and easy solution for their situation. They wanted a saviour. Jesus certainly appeared to be the answer. The time had finally come, the saviour was coming to the seat of all authority to confront the power that held them captive.

But Jesus weeps over the city because he knows what is going to happen over the next few days. He knows that there will be no easy solution for their problems. Redemption will take time. Perhaps he cries because he suspects that they have abandoned their faith and are merely looking for an earthly solution, someone to do it for them. Jesus knows there are dark days ahead and weeps for God's people.

In the midst of our dark times right now, I suppose we are looking for a saviour too. Perhaps we look to governments or perhaps we hope that some brilliant medical researcher will come up with a cure next week, some kind of solution. And of course we are told that the best thing we can do is to stay home and practice self isolation. It could be a long time before we get to the end of this.

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We are, however, Easter people. We know that out of the darkness of Good Friday comes the light of Easter. This is the basis of our faith. It's only natural for us to hope for a solution and we should, but in the meantime let us remember that we are an Easter people and that we belong to God who is with us always and whose love never lets us go.

And the people said.....

Let us pray:

Beloved, how are we to pray in the times of pandemic; when country after country imposes stringent stay-at-home orders when schools and restaurants and businesses are closed and all public gatherings are banned when what we do to relax and let go of tension... when the ways we come together to celebrate birthdays and weddings and graduations... when what we rely on to grieve and reassure and comfort one another in funerals and hugs and touch.....where those things have all been closed off when life seems to be put on permanent hold while we shelter in place and even those who like long stretches of time alone are finding the walls starting to close in?

**Breath**  
**Lord have mercy.**  
**Christ have mercy.**

Beloved, how are we to pray when fears start to consume us, when we can't shake off our worries about our own safety and those we love when we are daily reminded of the risks taken by health care workers and grocery store clerks and emergency service workers and all other essential service personnel?

**Breath**  
**Lord have mercy**  
**Christ have mercy**

Beloved, how can we pray when our lives are so cramped by worries about the virus that we can barely take in the fact that there was a major earthquake in Croatia and that the Great Barrier Reef in Australia has suffered another mass bleaching when we know that there must be so much going on in the world- both good and bad- that merits prayer, only right now neither the media or we ourselves, have the energy to focus on it?

**Breath**  
**Lord have mercy**  
**Christ have mercy**

Let us first of all be thankful for hints of goodness that creep into our tightly closed lives: when governments promise payments to assist the poor, the self- employed and unemployed during the crisis and when lending institutions promise not to foreclose and extend time on monthly payments. Let us be thankful for houses festooned with Christmas lights or candles or stuffed animals in windows to cheer their neighbours, for churches, synagogues and mosques that learn new ways to worship and minister in new ways, for online connections to family and friends, for phone calls to people we haven't talked to for a long time, for grandparents meeting loved ones through closed windows.

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**Breath**  
**Lord have mercy**  
**Christ have mercy.**

Beloved, we remember that God is with us, always! We remember that God is full of mercy, no matter whether we are angry, frustrated, fearful, sad or full of joy. When we believe, or so much want to believe, ***love will not be cancelled, songs will not be cancelled, and therefore hope will not be cancelled.***

**Breath**  
**Lord you are full of mercy**  
**Christ you are full of mercy**  
**Lord, we are filled with your mercy**

**Breath**

Amen

(Adapted from Prayers for the World)