

# Alexandra Presbyterian Church

March 28, 2021

## Palm Sunday

**Minister: Rev. Ian Shaw**

Stephanie Burgoyne, music director

Kaitlin Vandertuin, soprano

Reilley Smith, guest soloist

*This service is dedicated in the memory of Rev. Dr. Stan Cox*

### GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER

PRELUDE

"Largo" from *Concerto in A*

A. Vivaldi

### WE ARE CALLED TO WORSHIP

#### PLAM SUNDAY LITANY

Jerusalem, at last! We join the crowd streaming to the mountain.

We watch Jesus approach on a lowly donkey.

We hear the crowds cry "Hosanna!"

**"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**

**Hosanna in the highest heaven!"**

There is a joyful song in the air: the people cheer and the palms wave.

But the adulation of the crowd is shallow.

**Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna to the blessed of God.**

**Son of David, save us now.**

The crowd grows— the people want to be part of something important.

**"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"**

Let us pray.

**God of all times, we have followed Jesus into the crowded city.**

**We too want to catch a glimpse of Jesus. Reveal to us what true glory,  
leadership and obedience look like under your reign.**

**In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.**

Adapted from the original written by the Rev. Mary Whitson  
*"May the Lord bless the reading of His word to our hearts."*

HYMN 218

Hosanna, loud hosanna

**\* PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION**

Creator God, in praise and adoration our spirits dance before you today. You have created this wondrous universe and all the magnificent things within it. You have blessed us with so much throughout our lives, even to this very moment of this day of praise and thanksgiving.

Blessed are you Redeemer King, you are the Sovereign Lord of the universe - Hosanna in the highest. Blessed are you, O Saviour of the world, for you have saved us from ourselves, giving yourself for us in love.

Praise to you Spirit of truth and holiness. You give us the ability to perceive the fullness of divinity and humanity come together in Jesus and heralded in his exaltation in Jerusalem.

Father, Son and Spirit we greet you that we might learn more of you; we learn more of you that we might love you more passionately, more consistently, more completely.

Yet our love becomes lukewarm so quickly; we forget you so easily; we disown you so readily. We are changeable in our devotion to you, bending with the strongest wind, blown off course, capitulating to our culture – shouting Hosanna one moment and Crucify the next.

Lord have mercy.

Lord save us from our fickleness; help us to stay the course, to stay with you, to stand with you, and for you, and beside you.

Grant us your grace to overcome our sin, grant us your Holy Spirit to enable us to follow you, Lord Jesus, to have your compassion, your courage, your obedience; that we might be strong enough to forgive others, to love our neighbours, to strive for justice, to endure the cross, and to conquer all things with love.

Help us Father, to open ourselves to receive your Spirit, and to walk with your Son; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray...

**\* LORD'S PRAYER**

*Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done on earth as in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.*

## **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

John records Jesus' words: I do not call you servants any longer, but I have called you friends. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. Dear friends, Christ has laid down his life for us and invites us to love one another as he has loved us. Rejoice in his redeeming love and share it with each other day by day.

**SOLO**

*soloist Reilley Smith*

## **WE HEAR GOD'S WORD**

### **SCRIPTURES**

2 Samuel 6:12-19  
Revelation 4:9 – 5:14  
Gospel: John 12:12-28

**HYMN 216**

Hosanna

### **MEDITATION**

#### **“The King of glory comes”**

As I began to prepare for today, a number of Biblical passages and several news items came to mind. The news items heralded the eruption of a long dormant volcano in Iceland, the declaration of a state of emergency in Miami Beach, Florida and closer to home, the re-opening of outdoor dining in Toronto. The passages are the ones we read a few minutes ago, not surprisingly - the account in John of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as well as the story of the return of the Ark from Philistia by way of the home of Obed-Edom and the esoteric vision in Revelation of heaven's throne room.

I wonder, if like me, you perceive any connection between these six events? What, if anything, do they share in common? Well for sure the news stories offer the old mix of good and bad. The volcano is visually spectacular, yet can very quickly destroy everything nearby. The parties in Miami Beach celebrate the thrill of being with others which most of us desire, yet they threaten lives as the virus continues to spread into younger and younger parts of the population. Outdoor dining offers many businesses the possibility of survival, yet Toronto remains a highly infected part of the province.

Similar 'yes, but's' can be discerned in the scriptural accounts. King David and the people are elated, Queen Michal is not! As a result, a great marital disconnect occurs. In the gospel, the crowds are filled with hopeful anticipation. Not so the Pharisees! Even Jesus was aware of the foreboding future that awaited. And the throne room seems one sided with celebration, but there is an air of doom associated with the well-sealed scroll waiting for someone to open it.

But it is not this mixed dynamic that links them. What each event presents is something pent-up exploding from hidden-ness and boundedness. After many months of pandemic induced restrictions, it is a release most of us eagerly anticipate. Our Old Testament account displays worship pandemonium at its Pentecostal best. For years God's people had been shackled and enslaved by the neighboring Philistines. In one of the many battles between them, the Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant, the holy symbol of God's presence among the Israelites.

With David's ascendancy to the throne, Israel had achieved independence from the Philistines. After more than 20 years, it was time to bring the Ark into the newly established capital city of Jerusalem. In that return one can imagine the welling up of national identity, the bubbling forth of memories and stories of God's power, grace and promise, and the fervor of vigorous faith long lying latent in the soul and spirit, all coalescing within and bursting forth in a joyful celebration of sacrifice, dance, song, music and feasting. The only loser in this event is Michal, who appears to have only pride of position and memories of losses stored in her soul.

The book of Revelation, as well as being filled with difficult and vivid images and ideas, has great literary style. After two chapters of patterned messages to seven beleaguered churches of the late first century, we are ushered via vision into God's heavenly presence. Amid the splendor, we are introduced to an ongoing cycle of praise and worship. Yet even as the crowns are repeatedly laid before the feet of the One enthroned in glory, a sense of more presses into the scene. More than angelic hosts, strange creatures or seraphim, 2 dozen elders crowned as kings and perpetual songs of praise? Yet a building to a dramatic, climatic moment reverberates with bated expectation with every unfolding description. Something is about to burst into view and shatter all previous concepts of reality.

And with fanfare beyond imagining, the Lamb who seemed to have been slaughtered commands center stage and the cacophony of worship reaches even more exalted heights! And in the aftermath of such an outburst, all that can be uttered is, "Amen" – so be it.

We see much the same in the familiar journey of Palm Sunday. Like their ancestors of David's day, these Israelites are bound under foreign power. They long and dream for the day of deliverance, when a Messiah, like David, will come and set them free. For generations this expectancy has bubbled in their beings. They have frequently repeated the signs associated with this promised Deliverer – someone with his ancestral roots in David's line, someone who has David's capacity to connect with the common crowd, someone who has the anointing of God clearly upon him.

And Jesus arrives, riding a donkey, the mount of a king on his way to a coronation and all these long-remembered signs and deep inner yearnings, stirred by all the hype associated with this teacher from Galilee, reach the bursting point and branches and garments are tossed and shouts of acclamations are voiced, "*Hosanna. Blessed is the King of Israel!*" Even though they don't get it, the non-participating Pharisees, rightly grasp the import of the moment. They know this is an event that will change the whole world.

Seen through the results of the next few days plus the perspective of Revelation, we know far more fully than those crowds in Jerusalem, how pivotal this parade truly was.

There are three lenses through which this celebratory parade needs to be viewed. The first completely reframes the moment. Jesus introduces it in his comments after Andrew tells of Gentiles seeking after him. Revelation repeats it with the image of a Lamb who appears to have been killed. This coronation parade is also a funeral cortege. Jesus entered Jerusalem, not to overthrow the Romans, but to render sin, death and the devil powerless. He rode in, not to be elevated unto a throne, but to be raised up on a cross.

Only Jesus grasped the kind of coronation that awaited him, a crown of thorns not one made of gold and jewels. Only Jesus had hope in the power of God through his death to save the whole world. Only Jesus saw the ransacking of Satan's empire heralded by the Palm Day parade.

And only Jesus grasped that this parade wasn't about freedom from Roman bondage, but it was the harbinger of freedom from mortality and the ushering in of eternal hope. Entering Jerusalem, embracing the cross opened the gates to everlasting life. This hope, hinted at in Lazarus' rising from the dead, is made permanent in Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection shifts the focus from temporal celebration to unending jubilation, from hopeful shouts of Hosanna to heartfelt, grateful hollers of Hallelujah! From the limited and temporal majesty of earthly palaces to the indescribably, awesome glory of heaven's eternal throne room.

In addition to the processions of the Old Testament and the Gospel lessons, we perceive a hint of another, a final triumphant parade in the vision of Revelation. All the early chapters keep raising our perspective further up, farther on, offering peeks and glimpses that there is more, far more about to become reality. That reality is the return of Jesus, this time - not hailed by a rag tag entourage of followers and by-standers, but by myriad thousands of angelic hosts. This Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem is but a pale foreshadowing of Jesus coming in glory, when all will be made new and whole, when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, 'Jesus is Lord'. Those are the lenses through which this well-known event can be best viewed.

As we do, three connected responses will well up within and explode into expression. The first is gratitude. We see the branches spread on the road, we hear the 'loud hosannas' and we move beyond the thrill of the moment and understand that Jesus knew the truth. The truth that before the festival week was over, he would be cruelly executed. And he embraced that destiny. *"...Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"*

Our hearts plunge beneath the surface exultation and get immersed in this incredible divine love and from the depths of our being, thanksgiving bursts forth with humble and energizing commitment.

At the same time, we stand shoulder to shoulder with the crowds on the parade route voicing praise and adoration with exuberance. Often, we use Palm Sunday as an opportunity to become the children whom Jesus said form the core of his kingdom. We wave little tiny palms, clap our hands and even tap our toes. Occasionally we might march around the sanctuary. It feels good, but strange. For as Principal Glen said, 'We Presbyterians are a people of solemn joy'.

My friends, there is little restraint in any of the celebrations we observe today. These people of God knew there were only two options when God was powerfully in their midst. Either one fell prostrate in silence, barely daring to breathe or else one exploded in joy. It seems the second option is the one to be embraced more often. Why?

Because our inner selves have been embraced and renewed by the redeeming, restoring, empowering love of God. In the deepest part of our being we are assured of God's acceptance and presence. When that truth bursts to the surface, no expression of joy and adoration is too strong, too demonstrative, too much. Let me give you a target. The first Sunday, the masks come off and the Books of Praise are back in service, add at least 25% more volume to your singing, let your faces reflect the bliss expressed in the words and move just a little to the rhythm. Put your whole selves into the worship of the God who put his whole self into our creation and redemption.

And thirdly, my friends anticipate what awaits. Like so much of what we practice, this event serves as a reminder that something greater is ahead. Let the certainty of Jesus' return, ricochet and reverberate inside your mind and heart. Allow it to build up eager expectancy, hopeful resolve and focused commitment in ever-increasing levels. From these rich reserves, we, each one, will be enabled to greet every day with the twin dynamics of joy and thanksgiving, and be a people whose lives enthusiastically demonstrate our core belief that Jesus is Lord. Amen

## WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

### \* DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise Him all creatures here below.  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host.  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

### PRAYERS OF COMMITMENT, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

O Lord, you rode on.

You rode over the cloaks and under the branches, you rode through the shouts and past the praises, receiving the adoration that you deserved, but not confusing our praise in your presence for your purpose in coming.

O Lord, you rode on.

You rode towards the controversy and the cost, you rode towards the curses and the cross; receiving the stripes you didn't deserve, to give us a reward that we couldn't earn.

O Lord, you rode on.

You rode through the tomb and the grave, you rode through our time and space, ascending to a throne that will never decay, a priesthood that will never pass away, a life of love that will always remain, an inclination toward us that hears us even now as we pray.

O Lord, you rode on.

We remember the journey you have taken as we commit ourselves to walking in the same way. Give us the strength, hope, and joy we need to follow without wavering, hesitating or straying. Majestic One, as we watch you take that familiar path with your eyes set on the victory that awaited, we rejoice with grateful hearts as recipients of a love and mercy beyond all imaging. When we glimpse the incredible worship life in glory, we rejoice with grateful hearts, humbled by the realization that we are numbered among such an awesome entourage. When we peek again at the horizon heralding your triumphant return, we rejoice with grateful hearts for the inheritance that awaits when time shall be no more.

Now Glorious Ruler, we ask that you would direct our wonder and worship to the world in which we serve. Grant to our leaders, in the church and in society, an unsullied and undivided desire to seek the best for the most. Give to those who mourn, comfort; to those who are confused, clarity; to those who despair, hope and to us who have been graced with good news, compassion and a willingness to shine light into every dark recess we encounter.

In silence we, each one, now lift up to you the deep concerns of our hearts ....  
Amen

\* **BENEDICTION**  
\* **CHORAL AMEN**  
**POSTLUDE**



**In Our Prayers:**  
Edith Cowper  
Bruce Wheatley  
Jeannie Carmichael  
Joan MacQueen  
The family of Rev. Stan Cox

**Our heartfelt condolences and prayers to the family of Rev. Stan Cox.  
Stan entered eternal life Wednesday, March 24, 2021**

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