



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024
Worship at Home

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CALL TO WORSHIP (provided by Presbyterian World Service and Development)

L: On this Palm Sunday, we see Jesus entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey, showing us the way of peace.

P: **With palm branches in hand, we cry out “Hosanna,” save us now, save us from our warring madness.**

L: “We affirm that God is at work when people are ashamed of the inhumanity of war and work for peace with justice.

P: **“We pray for peace to him who is the Prince of Peace.”** (Living Faith 8.5.3)

Hymn 214 **All glory, laud and honour**

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord’s Prayer

We gather here, O God, seeking to encounter you, longing to feel your presence. We aspire to embody more love and generosity, more patience and kindness, more tranquillity and rootedness, more acceptance and less judgment.

Yet the ups and downs of life can sometimes bring out our worst, O God, rather than our best. We find ourselves criticizing, envying, and resenting others, misunderstanding and being intolerant of them. Our impatience leads us to hurt others with our words, actions, and attitudes. Although we desire to speak honestly and truthfully, often our honesty lacks love, O God. We aim to be sincere and transparent, yet we often fear the opinions of others, preferring gossip over open communication. Hear us, O God, as we confess our shortcomings to you in this moment of silence. (pause)

Meet us and listen to us, O God, in this sacred space and time. Meet us with the opportunity for forgiveness. Challenge us to repent and change our ways. Be for us a source of faith, a foundation of hope, and a guiding spirit that shapes us into the compassionate individuals we aspire to be.

As we reflect on the story of Jesus rebuking his disciples, James and John, strengthen our resolve to follow him and to serve you and those we encounter, both near and far, with the same courage he displayed. And we offer this prayer in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray together, saying,

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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 and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn 740 Make me a channel of your peace**Prayer for Understanding**

Gracious God,

As we hear your living Word today, open our hearts to its message. Teach us humility and service, like Jesus, who came to serve. Illuminate our minds to understand your will for us. May we find joy in serving others, following the example of Jesus. In his name, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29
1 Corinthians 1: 18-31; Mark 10: 35-45; Matthew 21: 1-11

SERMON “Not to be Served but to Serve”

Soo-young has a shoe repair business downtown Toronto. He works hard to support his family and is a happy man who finds satisfaction in his small business. He takes pride in serving his customers with integrity, and he guarantees his work. One day he met a homeless person on the street and was surprised to recognize him as a former customer.

Once, David dressed in fancy suits, wore fancy shoes, and drove a fancy sportscar. Growing up poor, his parents had instilled in him the need to make something of himself and ensure he didn't end up like them. He got a good job and rose up the company ranks. He married an attractive woman, bought a big house, had children, and everyone wanted what David had. He was successful. He was treated like a star. He fed off of the admiration and envy of others. He needed praise like a drug.

Eventually, something snapped. He couldn't do it anymore. He ended up in a hospital psych ward, no longer able to care for others as he used to. Now, he was the one who needed care. His family really tried. But David couldn't accept himself in his raw fragility, vulnerability and need. If he was not a success, he was a failure, a nobody, not worthy of love. His wife took the children and left, and he ended up on the street. When Soo-young met David as a homeless person, he didn't look upon the shame of David's failure. He still treats David as one of his valuable customers. He regards David as his friend.

Palm Sunday was 2000 years ago, and Jesus was entering the city of Jerusalem. Many have anticipated this moment. They have been longing for a Messiah king to come and save them for centuries. The Messiah king will bring about a new day. But kings need to make an impression.

They need to demonstrate to the people that they can defeat any foreign power, even if it is the great Roman empire.

But Jesus doesn't do that. Yes, he comes into Jerusalem to much praise: "Praise to David's Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise be to God!". (Matt 21:9) But not everyone is cheering. The authorities seem less than thrilled. And besides that, there are things about Jesus that are not very king-like. Kings come with war horses and armed soldiers. Jesus arrives on a donkey without any weapons.

The closest disciples of Jesus are all still taken with fantasies of what God's kingdom is supposed to be like: patterned after the splendour and glory of worldly kingdoms. Such fantasies are rooted in the self against others and create competitiveness, mistrust, resentment, and conflict. James and John ignite the fire by requesting key positions in the new kingdom. They have not understood that Jesus' glory will be manifested on a cross, and those on his right and left will be criminals! That is how far their desires and understanding are from the passion and path of Jesus.

But Jesus tells them not to fear. Instead, he calls them to follow in his footsteps, predicting the crosses they will have to bear when they are ready. Those who want to be great in God's kingdom must be ready to lay down their lives for one another. And this is modeled most beautifully by Jesus himself who does "not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people."

Greatness is in the one doing the serving. Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give his life for a very different kind of liberation from a very different kind of oppression. The greatest enemy is not without but within.

We know how this story ends. The people who are somebodies in Jesus' world are going to reject Jesus' vision as forcefully as possible through crucifixion. And the core message of this gospel story is closely related to the apostle Paul's message to the Christians of Corinth. The cross is not a symbol of defeat but a symbol of victory. These are the words of Paul: "For the message about the cross is foolishness to the world. But to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Consider your own call, brothers, and sisters, not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth. God chose what is low and despised in the world to reduce to nothing those who think they are something. For we serve Christ who became for us in his very humility of service the power of God."

We live in a world where people measure how successful and accomplished they are by how much they can buy and how many people serve them. Imagine if we saw service not as a sacrifice but as self-giving that fills us up and gives us our greatest purpose and joy. Jesus is saying that having to be somebody is a disease. This disease must be crucified within us. Only then can we rise up to a whole other way of looking at the purpose, meaning, and joy of life. To serve is a gift and an opportunity.

Let me go back to the story I introduced at the beginning. Soo-young knows what service means. It is not a sacrifice but a giving from the heart. David is living in a prison he can't seem to get

out of. The prison is not that he is living on the street. The prison is that he cannot accept his vulnerable humanity, which makes him like everyone else. Humility is not humiliation. Humility is seeing ourselves in the mirror for who we are and embracing ourselves as we are for all our wondrous imperfections.

The Apostle Paul says that instead of being ashamed of where you come from, embrace the God in Jesus, who is coming to meet you in all your vulnerable humanity. Only out of that place of vulnerability can you love other vulnerable beings as Jesus loves them. And only out of such loving and serving can you discover a far more precious and fulfilling purpose than reaching the top of whatever ladder you are climbing.

What masters are we serving? What idols are we worshipping? What are the prisons or attachments or compulsions that have had a hold of us for far too long? In what ways have we given up or given in because we are too helpless or apathetic to fight in order to manage and overcome?

May God help us discover the joy of service. May God help us discover fulfillment, not in how much we have sacrificed, but how much we have given, receiving back more still until our life is overflowing in abundance.

“The Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.” What about you and me? Amen.

Hymn 637 Take my life, and let it be consecrated

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Loving God,

As we give today, may our generosity reflect the humility and service shown in your teachings. Bless these gifts to spread your message of love and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Awesome and Ever-Present God,

We thank you for the many blessings bestowed upon us, for the love we share, and for the gifts of life, joy, and peace. May these blessings inspire us to reach out to those who feel unloved and alone, whose lives are burdened with emptiness, anxiety, fear, or illness, and who seek faith, justice, or assistance but find none. Grant us the grace to be faithful servants dedicated to serving you and one another to advance Jesus' kingdom in accordance with your divine will, O God.

As we offer our thanks, we also lift up prayers of concern for the troubled regions of our world, where conflict and strife overshadow the lives of many. May Your healing Spirit permeate these

areas, bringing forth peace with justice. While the media often spotlights conflicts in Palestine, Israel, and Ukraine, we acknowledge the myriad of other regions in dire need of reconciliation and restoration, including Iran, Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Cameroon, Sudan, Haiti, Mexico, and countless other nations and their inhabitants. Extend Your care and solace to those scarred by conflict, grant wisdom to peacemakers, and embolden advocates for the marginalized.

In the midst of our gratitude, we also bring before You the concerns and burdens of those near and dear to us. We lift up friends grappling with grief, individuals battling illness or awaiting treatment, those encountering workplace challenges or seeking employment, and members of our communities navigating disagreements. We entrust to You the names and situations weighing heavily upon us at this moment, seeking Your healing touch and comfort. (pause)

God of Peace, as we journey toward the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection, we pray for the Church's ongoing ministry in our local communities and across the globe. Send forth Your healing Spirit to uplift our hearts and renew our hopes with the promise of new life in Christ. Restore to us the joy found in Your saving grace, and instill within us a persistent and willing spirit to continue serving Your kingdom faithfully.

On this Palm Sunday, we ask for Your blessing as we honor Your Son, our Lord. Through the Holy Spirit, unite us with Christ, who chose the difficult path over the easy one, so that we may abide in You both now and forever. Enable us to love You and one another not only today but in all the days to come.

Guide and protect us wherever we may find ourselves—in hospitals, in our homes, or without shelter. May we continually seek Your presence, living lives characterized by faith, hope, and love. Wherever people suffer from poverty, sickness, or grief, alleviate their pain and restore them to wholeness. Wherever individuals challenge oppressive systems, grant them courage and lead them to freedom by Your Spirit.

Fill us with Your Spirit, making us instruments of Your presence to all whom we encounter. We offer these prayers and more in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn 371 Love divine, all loves excelling

BENEDICTION

May God's eternal blessing, the peace of the Risen Jesus, and the fellowship we share in the Holy Spirit be with us all this day and forevermore.

Sung Response- Go Now In Peace
Postlude

<p>We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe</p>

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Good Friday Service on Friday, March 29, at 11:00 am at Rockway**

***Two Bible studies:** Join us for Wednesday Bible study at 10:00 AM at First Church, led by Diane McMillan. Our Thursday Bible study was suspended due to Fran's illness. She is currently at the hospital in Port Colborne for her physiotherapy treatment.

***Outreach - Thursday Walking:** Join us for the Wellness Walk and Coffee Chat! We gather at 9:30 a.m. at Canada Games Park to start our walk together. After the walk, we meet at Rockway for a joyful chat over hot and fresh coffee at 10:45 am.

***Quilting Gathering:** Join us for our quilting session on Tuesday, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM at North Pelham. All sewing enthusiasts are welcome to participate!

***Good Friday Service on March 29:** We will gather at Rockway for the 'Walk' event at 10 am, followed by the Good Friday Service at 11 am. Fellowship will follow the service.

***Easter Sunday Breakfast and Service on March 31:** We will gather at North Pelham for our Easter Sunday service at 10 am, featuring Communion. Prior to the service, we'll be serving an Eggs Benedict Easter Breakfast at 9 am. All are welcome! Freewill offerings will be collected, with proceeds supporting Rose City Kids in Welland, benefiting children and youth in our community.

***Special Guest Preacher: Rev. Pearl Vasarhelyi on April 14 | Rev. Jacob's Study Leave from April 8-15:** We're delighted to welcome Rev. Pearl as our guest preacher on April 14 while Jacob is on study leave from April 8-15.

***Spring Book Sale by the Canadian Bible Society:** The Niagara Branch of the Canadian Bible Society will host a Spring Used Book Sale at Fairview Mall on April 19-20, 2024. Please spread the word and bring books, DVDs, and CDs early on those mornings. Assistance in setting up tables and refreshing displays is appreciated.

***Connect with your Minister Jacob for pastoral visits.** Reach Jacob at jacoblee0501@gmail.com or 289-213-2797.