

Worship for April 10, 2022
Palm/ Passion Sunday

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Lenten Reading Tim and Amy Moore

*Call to Worship

Humble and riding on a donkey,

we greet you.

Acclaimed by crowds and caroled by children,

we cheer you.

Moving from the peace of the countryside

to the corridors of power,

we salute you, Christ, our Lord.

You are giving the beasts of burden a new dignity;

You are giving majesty a new face;

You are giving those who long for redemption

a new song to sing.

With them, with heart and voice,

we shout, "Hosanna! God save us!"

*Hymn 197 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

Prayer of the Day

We praise you, O God,

for your redemption of the world through Jesus Christ.

Today he entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph

and was proclaimed Messiah and King

by those who spread garments and branches along his way.

Let these branches be signs of victory,

and grant that we, who carry them, may follow him in the way of the cross,

that dying and rising with him, we may enter into your kingdom,

through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

First Reading

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Prayer of Confession

Holy and merciful God, in your presence we confess our failure to be what you created us to be.

You alone know how often we have sinned in wandering from your ways, in wasting your gifts, in forgetting your love.

By your mercy, help us to live in your light and walk in your ways, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and we may dwell in peace. Amen.

Moments With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 19:28-40

Morning Message

It seems like we just get the Christmas decorations put away when Lent rolls around. We make a swift transition from the rich textures of color, scent, and sound, gifts and traditions, family and carols, to the austere season of Lent.

In centuries past, Lent was strictly observed as a time of austerity. After Fat Tuesday, there would be no rich food, no parties, no weddings, no baptisms. In many of our liturgical churches, crosses and icons were draped in purple or black and no alleluias escaped the lips of even the best choir.

Lent was a time of simplicity, and for those who wanted to take it even more seriously, Lent was a time of self-denial. One would “give up” some creature comfort or pleasure in order to identify with Jesus, who gave up everything, even his life and breath, for us. Some Christians adhere to this practice today.

Rachel Held Evans was one of my favorite contemporary theologians and preachers. I urge you to read her work. Maybe some of us could read it together, for it’s very thought-provoking and tends toward the humorous.

As a young married couple, Rachel and her husband, Dan, became disillusioned with their church. They were looking for a different way to practice the Christian faith that honored their emergent progressive theology. They acknowledged their deep love for the congregation. Rachel's own parents were long-time members. Rachel's father was a well-respected professor in a Christian college in the town of Dayton, Tennessee. He and Rachel's mother were very active in the church's life of faith. To leave the church was a heart-wrenching decision.

In time, after visiting many different churches and denominations, Rachel, Dan, and several other young people, organized a new church, one they hoped emphasized the importance of love and de-emphasized identifying occasions of sin.

They met on Sunday nights in the free apartment on the second floor of the local funeral home. They worshiped, tithed, reached out to the community in need, and eventually had the funds to rent a little store front place and there they established the church and gave it the name, The Mission.

The following story is one Rachel wrote as she prepared for the first Palm Sunday they would celebrate in their storefront sanctuary.

“The tradition of folding a palm frond into the shape of a cross powerfully illustrates the kingdom message of Jesus, as a symbol of royalty becomes a symbol of sacrifice. The victory of Jesus did not take the shape of forceful triumph, but of humility and that our citizenship in the Kingdom of God demands we do the same.”

Which is why Rachel got really upset when she realized the palm fronds she bought weren't the right size for folding.

Dan took one look at the wilting potted palm she had brought home from BiLo and said, “I think they needed to be at least 21 inches long.”

“Well, if you want to go out in the pouring rain to buy a \$40 palm tree, be my guest,” she shot back.

She writes, “I was determined to present a little cross to everyone at church in honor of Palm Sunday and the commencement of Holy Week. So the two of us spent the afternoon painstakingly folding the six-inch leaves into tiny green crosses. The meticulous nature of the work frustrated me, and as I struggled to make one particularly misshapen cross hold together, I couldn’t help but see a parallel between the unraveling little cross in my hands and the unraveling faith in my heart.

The symbolism was depressing.

I had lofty intentions when I decided to observe the church calendar this year, and things were going very well until Lent.

Advent, Christmas and Epiphany had gone well. Unfortunately, Ash Wednesday fell on a day when I woke up unsure that God even exists, in a week when I felt betrayed by a group of Christians, and in a month full of writing deadlines and social commitments. Although I diligently kept my fast throughout the season, I felt as though I did a better job honoring the letter of the law than the spirit of the law.

I’d hoped to get into a steady rhythm of daily prayer and reflection, but instead found myself feeling distant from God, distracted by work, and cynical about the Church.

But the crumpled fronds and awkward crosses spread across my dining room table spoke not of holiness, but of imperfection. Messy, screwed-up, real-life imperfection.

It took a few hours and a few completed crosses for me to realize that this is how it’s supposed to be.

The symbolism was perfectly imperfect.

Holy Week wasn’t perfect for the disciples. They betrayed, ran away, lied, despaired, and doubted.

Holy Week wasn't perfect for Jesus. He wept. He wondered if there were another way. He experienced the same agony and isolation that inspired the poet David to ask, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Holy Week wasn't perfect for God, as he looks down on the messes we have made, the wars that we wage, and the imperfect representation of His Son that we clumsily project to the world.

For most of us, Holy Week isn't so holy. In fact, it's more like the unholy mess spread across my kitchen table on a cold and rainy Palm Sunday afternoon.

And maybe that's how it's supposed to be. Maybe Holy Week isn't about perfection maintained, but about imperfection restored- an execution device transformed into a symbol of pardon, three denials transformed into three declarations of love, a tomb transformed into the birthplace of hope."

So, take your palm frond home with you. Tape it to your fridge or lay it on your nightstand. Leave it on the dashboard of your vehicle. Make it into a cross or give it away.

However that simple green frond speaks to you, let it speak. And listen carefully to the voices crowded along the road that day long ago. The ones that shouted, "Hosanna! God save us!"

Now that symbolism is beautiful.

*Affirmation of Faith The Nicene Creed p. 34

*Hymn 580 Gloria Patri

Celebrating the Sacrament of Communion

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving including the Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

Prayer After Communion

**God, our help and strength,
you have satisfied our hunger with this Eucharistic food.
Strengthen our faith,
that through the death and resurrection of your Son
we may be led to salvation,
for he is Lord today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.**

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

* Hymn 606 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

**Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things.
Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts.
Use us and what we have gathered,
In feeding the world with your love,
Through the one who gave himself for us,
Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

*Hymn 196 All Glory, Laud, and Honor

*Blessing

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

*Postlude