

Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday
Synod-wide worship - BC Synod
March 28, 2021

Introduction

This week, the center of the church's year, is one of striking contrasts: Jesus rides into Jerusalem surrounded by shouts of glory, only to be left alone to die on the cross, abandoned by even his closest friends. Mark's gospel presents Jesus in his complete human vulnerability: agitated, grieved, scared, forsaken. Though we lament Christ's suffering and all human suffering, we also expect God's salvation: Jesus promises that his death will mark a new covenant with all people. We enter this holy week thirsty for the completion of God's astonishing work.

GATHERING AND WELCOME

Welcome and thank you for joining us for our Palm / Passion Sunday worship. I am Pastor Kathy Martin and I serve as the Assistant to the Bishop of our BC Synod for Missional Renewal and Congregational Care. Here with me also is Bishop Greg Mohr, our preacher for today's service.

We are grateful for the use of Mt. Zion Lutheran Church, New Westminster, where we are recording our portions of the worship service. We acknowledge that we gather on the traditional, ancestral, un-ceded territories of the Qayqayt First Nation of the Coast Salish Peoples. We invite you to take a moment to offer your own acknowledgement of the land where you worship, live, work and play.

We also are grateful for the musical gifts shared with us today. The names of those playing and singing are listed in the worship folder and at the end of this recording.

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God. This morning we hear this welcome cry of "Hosanna!" around our BC Synod.

ACCLAMATION

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL: Mark 11:1-11

The holy gospel according to Mark.
Glory to you, O Lord.

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then

they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

BLESSING OF PALMS

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Let us pray.
A brief silence is kept.

We praise you, O God,
for redeeming the world through our Savior Jesus Christ.
Today he entered the holy city in triumph
and was proclaimed messiah and king
by those who spread garments and branches along his way.
Bless these branches and those who carry them.
Grant us grace to follow our Lord in the way of the cross,
so that, joined to his death and resurrection,
we enter into life with you;
through the same Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Let us go forth in peace,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

PALM PROCESSION

All Glory, Laud, and Honor # 344

Refrain
All glory, laud, and honor
to you, redeemer, king
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.

You are the king of Israel
and David's royal Son
now in the Lord's name coming
our King and Blessed One.

Refrain

All glory, laud, and honor
to you, redeemer, king
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.

The company of angels
Are praising you on high;
creation and all mortals
in chorus make reply.

Refrain

All glory, laud, and honor
to you, redeemer, king
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring

The multitude of pilgrims
with palms before you went.
Our praise and prayer and anthems
before you we present

Refrain

All glory, laud, and honor
to you, redeemer, king
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring

To you, before your passion,
they sang their hymns of praise.
To you, now high exalted
our melody we raise

Refrain

All glory, laud, and honor
to you, redeemer, king
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring

Their praises you accepted;
accept the prayers we bring,
great author of all goodness,
O good and gracious king.

Refrain

All glory, laud, and honor
to you, redeemer, king
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring

PRAYER OF THE DAY

As we now enter into the contemplation of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and meditate on the salvation of the world through his sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection, let us pray.

Silence is kept.

Everlasting God, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take on our nature and to suffer death on the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:4-9a

The image of the servant of God is one of the notable motifs in the book of Isaiah. Today's reading describes the mission of the servant, whom early Christians associated with Jesus. Like Jesus, the servant does not strike back at his detractors but trusts in God's steadfast love.

⁴The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.
Morning by morning the Lord GOD wakens—
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.
⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.
⁶I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.

⁷The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
⁸he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
^{9a}It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

Word of God, word of life.
Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:5-11

Christ did not act to attain status and glory but was obedient to God even to the point of death. Following Christ's example, we do not seek personal status or glory but care for others as God cared for us in Christ's death.

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, although being in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷but relinquished it all,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God, the Father.

Word of God, word of life.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL: [Mark 14:1—15:1] Mark 15:1:47

The holy gospel according to Mark.
Glory to you, O Lord.

You are invited to read the entire gospel during your devotions. We begin at the 15th chapter of Mark's Gospel in our worship today.

[¹It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ²for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

³While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why

was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

¹²On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” ¹³So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ¹⁵He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” ¹⁶So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷When it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” ¹⁹They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, “Surely, not I?” ²⁰He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. ²¹For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

²²While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” ²³Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written,

‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.’

²⁸But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” ²⁹Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” ³⁰Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” ³¹But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same.

³²They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” ³⁵And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” ³⁷He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ³⁹And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And once more he came

and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴³Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.

⁴⁴Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." ⁴⁵So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁴⁶Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." ⁵⁰All of them deserted him and fled.

⁵¹A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, ⁵²but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

⁵³They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. ⁵⁴Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. ⁵⁶For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, ⁵⁸We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.' ⁵⁹But even on this point their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" ⁶¹But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

⁶²Jesus said, "I am; and

'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.' "

⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death.

⁶⁵Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

⁶⁶While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by.

⁶⁷When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." ⁶⁸But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. ⁶⁹And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." ⁷¹But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." ⁷²At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.]

^{15:1}As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ²Pilate

asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You say so.”³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things.⁴ Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.”⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked.⁷ Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection.⁸ So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom.⁹ Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”¹⁰ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over.¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead.¹² Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?”¹³ They shouted back, “Crucify him!”¹⁴ Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!”¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort.¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him.¹⁸ And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!”¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him.²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.²² Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull).²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it.²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

²⁵ It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him.²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.”²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.²⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days,³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!”³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.³⁴ At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.”³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.”³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.⁴¹ These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the

sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON - Bishop Greg Mohr

It is difficult for us as pastors to go and stand behind the pulpit on Palm Sunday or on Good Friday and preach. Because when we as pastors stand here on those two days, we must talk about Jesus' death. And it is hard to know what all to say about that and what it means. It is hard talking about death. For when we talk about Jesus' death, at some point, we also must talk about, or at least acknowledge, our own death as well.

In our work as pastors, we see enough death and sorrow. We see people in hospital rooms as they slowly draw their last breaths. We see death in the faces of those left behind as they mourn the loss of their loved ones. We see death take away relationships, friends, family, future. I doubt that I am alone in this sentiment about the challenge of preaching on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. I am guessing that a lot of us pastors would much rather begin a sermon with a very different story. After all, the last time the church gathered for a vital time of celebration and reflection, a dramatically different Biblical story was read that night: "And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night . . . And the angel said to them, 'Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy....'" (Lk 2)

Now that's a story I can preach about!

My guess is that it is probably much easier for you to attend church at Christmas, too, isn't it? I'm sure you find it much harder to attend to church - even on-line - on a day like today, or to log-in once again on Good Friday. There are no presents to look forward to on a day like today. There is no tree to decorate. No lights to put up. No cards to send. There is just . . . a story about death.

For generation after generation, the church has proclaimed: "Christ died for you." What do you say in response to someone who has died for you? What do you do in response to this self-giving love? We hear about such things during times of war, where someone jumps on a grenade and sacrifices their life to save others. We hear stories of people caught in freezing water, and where someone hands the helicopter's life-saving rope to another person, and by the time the helicopter returns, that person is nowhere to be seen. We hear stories like that.

The church proclaims that twenty centuries ago someone died for us; someone laid down their life for us with a self-giving love; for us, yes, but not just for us - for this world, for all of creation.

We tend to focus on the words "for us." We tend to think of how wonderfully superior we human beings are; how special we are. We are so very anthropocentric - thinking that it's all about us! But what do we read in John 3:16? "For God so loved the world ..." The world. All of it - not just humans. The cosmos. And we see that this self-giving love is not just "for us" but is for the world. God so loved the world. Jesus gave his life for the world.

As Paul notes in Romans 8: We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves ..." (Romans 8:22-23a) Note how Paul speaks of creation first, and then about us. Jesus' love, his care, his justice, his resurrection, is for this world that God loves, that God created, that God cares for, that God gifts.

Jesus' self-giving love for the world shatters all that binds us, all that destroys us. His life and death challenge us to a different life, a different way - a way of self-sacrifice, a way of loving, of being, a justice-seeking way, a journey of reconciliation in all our relations, with one another and with creation. "God in flesh," we say; God coming to us; loving us, to overthrow all that binds us, controls us, that breaks us, that shatters our lives.

Jesus, the great liberator, so loves the world - even in all of its brokenness, its racism, its pride and the prejudice and privilege, the environmental degradation, the sexism and homophobia, the judgmentalism and selfishness, the powers and principalities that need to be overturned. God comes to us and to our world and loves us to death.

A moment ago I made reference to Christmas. But think about that story for a moment; think of the story where the angel declares to Mary that she is going to give birth to Jesus. What does Mary do? She sings. But she doesn't just sing any old song. She sings a song of protest; of justice-seeking. She sings a song that prophesies what this baby will do and be and usher in. Mary sings a song for a world in need of healing. She sings a song of defiance. She sings a song of justice. And Mary said, 'My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you, my Saviour. For you have looked with favour upon your lowly servant... You have shown strength with your arm; you have scattered the proud in their conceit; you have deposed the mighty from their thrones, and raised the lowly to high places. You have filled the hungry with good things, while you have sent the rich away empty...' (Luke 1:46-48a, 51-53) That kind of loving, that kind of justice-seeking, earth-shattering love, turns our world upside down.

On the night before he was crucified, Jesus tells his disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you." God loves us passionately and invites our passionate response. We are to love with that kind of love. We are to live with that kind of love. Our immediate response to this might be to say, "No, thank you. This is too hard. This is a path for which I am unprepared." Perhaps we would rather stay where we are than to have to find ourselves on a road that leads to Calvary. No wonder we resist the cross and what it means. No wonder we try to tame it and make the cross all shiny and beautiful. We turn it into jewelry. We carve beautiful crosses, sanded smooth and varnished. Yet we continue to be fascinated by the love revealed there. We are drawn to it even as we are repelled by it.

God is at the heart of this passion and pain, and where God is, there is life in all its fullness. In Jesus, we see a God who enters fully and completely into our existence. In Jesus, we see a God

who stops at nothing to save the lost, the last, and the least. And Jesus calls us to follow him, to follow him on that path. It was a path that took him to those on the outside, those shunned by society, those wounded and hurting from a hurtful world. It was a path that took him to those broken in spirit and broken in body: a blind man, a leper, a woman not allowed to be touched by anyone due to a flow of blood. It was a path he took that often put him at odds with the rulers of the day, with the powerful, with the self-righteous. But wherever he went, he reached out. He cared for the person behind the illness. He saw the humanity inside each and everyone. And he challenged the authorities when the authorities sought to diminish people or sought to hold power unto itself. Instead, Jesus gave power away; He taught us to turn the other cheek, to love the unlovable, to love even one's enemies.

And then it was, on the night in which he was betrayed, that he took . . . a towel. You thought I was going to say something else, didn't you? You thought I was going to say, "On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took bread . . . and wine." But if we look just at John's gospel, we have a very different story. We have a new image of what this kin-dom is to be that Jesus ushers in. "On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took a towel and a basin of water . . . images of diakonia, of servant hood.

It is a story, a calling, of towel and water; a story of service, of humble service, and the writer of the Gospel of John wanted us to know that story as well as the story of Holy Communion. What does this towel-taking action - what does this vocation - mean for us? That we stand in solidarity with those underfoot, those on the edge, those on the margins of our society, those tossed out, looked down upon, judged, thought less of, because that is where Jesus is standing, over there, in the midst of them.

What does this towel-taking action mean for us? To stand in solidarity, yes, to seek justice, yes, to challenge systemic structures of racism, sexism and more, yes. But also . . . to speak for the grandeur of old growth forests who need our voices to echo in the chambers of power, but also to call out for the air we breathe, knowing that our carbon output is not loving our neighbour, knowing that the effects of our carbon footprints mean that someone's land will disappear from rising seas, that someone's home will get flooded, that droughts will leave millions starving, that fires will ravage vast swaths of lands and cities.

This towel-taking commitment also means that we sing for the seas, whose ice diminishes exponentially, where polar bears have fewer than 100 years to live, where the acidification of the oceans is rapidly escalating, resulting in dying waters. All creation groans . . . All my relations . . . We are all inter-connected.

These are hard texts for us to hear this Holy Week. For after Jesus had washed the disciples' feet, and after Jesus had put his robe back on, he joins them at table and says, "Do you know what I have done to you?" It is more than foot-washing; it is more than Jesus doing what a servant would normally have done. It is more than all of that. It is a calling forth of vocation. "As I have washed your feet, so you ought to wash one another's feet." Take up my cross and follow me.

Sometimes our following of Christ shows itself in a natural outpouring of love and compassion. Sometimes it is something that is brutally hard to do. But many times, it is simply that which

needs to be learned and practiced over a lifetime of following Christ, of trying to be Christ-like. We need to grow daily in God's way, to love in God's way, to serve in God's way. We need help practicing this so that we become what we practice, and so that is why we gather in church, in community, whether in-person or on-line, to be surrounded by others who are also on this road with us.

As we encounter the suffering in our own lives, and as we encounter the suffering in other people's lives, we seek to be like Christ to them. These scripture readings for Holy Week remind us that we are not alone in this suffering. God is with us: dying, suffering, hurting, starving, weeping throughout the world, and for the world.

The presence of God is there, in those moments, in our lives. To suffer and die is Jesus' life-giving ministry to us, to the world. As one writer states: "In the cross, God is seen for who God is." (John Westerhoff)

In the death of Christ we find the greatest expression of God's self-giving love for us... and for the world. AMEN.

HYMN OF THE DAY

Light Dawns on a Weary World (ELW 726)

Light dawns on a weary world
when eyes begin to see all people's dignity.
Light dawns on a weary world:
the promised day to justice comes.

Refrain:

The trees shall clap their hands;
the dry lands, gush with spring;
the hills and mountains shall break forth with singing!
We shall go out with joy,
and be led forth in peace,
as all the world in wonder echoes shalom.

Love grows in a weary world
When hungry hearts find bread
And children's dreams are fed.
Love grows in a weary world;
The promised feast of plenty comes.

Refrain:

The trees shall clap their hands;
the dry lands, gush with spring;
the hills and mountains shall break forth with singing!
We shall go out with joy,
and be led forth in peace,
as all the world in wonder echoes shalom.

Hope blooms in a weary world
when creatures, once forlorn, find wilderness reborn.
Hope blooms in a weary world:
the promised green of Eden comes.

Refrain:

The trees shall clap their hands;
the dry lands, gush with spring;
the hills and mountains shall break forth with singing!
We shall go out with joy,
and be led forth in peace,
as all the world in wonder echoes shalom.

CREED

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**
**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**
**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

In Jesus you came among us as a suffering servant. Give your church humility. Redeem your people from pride and the certainty that we always know your will. Heal us and empower us to confess Christ crucified. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In creation, life springs from death. Redeem your creation awaiting resurrection: restore lost habitats and endangered species. Create new possibilities for areas affected by climate change,

grant relief from natural disasters, and nurture new growth. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Jesus was handed over to the powers of this world. In all nations, instruct the powerful, that they would not exploit their power but maintain justice. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

On the cross Jesus joined all who feel forsaken. Abide with those who are condemned to death. Defend those who are falsely accused. Console and strengthen those who are mocked or bullied. Accompany all who suffer; grant respite and renewal. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You called followers to tend Jesus' body in death. Sustain hospice workers and funeral directors. Bless this congregation's ministries at times of death: those who plan and lead funerals, those who prepare meals, all who offer support in grief. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You inspired the centurion to confess Jesus as your Son. We praise you for the faith you have given to people of all places and times. Give us also such faith to trust the promises of baptism and, with them, to look for the resurrection of the dead. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE.

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

OFFERING

At this point in our worship services we usually receive the Offering. In the Offering, we not only offer our financial gifts for the ministry of the church, but we also make a re-commitment, an offering, of ourselves for Christ's ministry in the world.

Thank you for your faithful support through your financial gifts to the ministry of your local congregation and, through the congregation, to ministry in the synod, across the ELCIC, and out in the global world beyond these borders.

OFFERING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God,
Maker of all things.

Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts:
our selves, our time, and our possessions.

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 Saviour and Lord.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

SENDING: God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.
The Lord look upon you with favor and ✝ give you peace.
Amen.

SENDING SONG

Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery (ELW 334)

Tree of Life and awesome mystery,
in your death we are reborn;
though you die in all of history,
still you rise with every morn,
still you rise with every morn.

We remember truth once spoken,
love passed on through act and word;
every person lost and broken
wears the body of our Lord,
wears the body of our Lord.

Christ, you lead and we shall follow,
stumbling though our steps may be;
one with you in joy and sorrow,
we the river, you the sea,
we the river, you the sea.

DISMISSAL

The road that we are going to travel this week is strewn with human stories of betrayal, fear, confusion, love and loss. In it, we will hear echoes of the realities of our own lives and the life of the world God loves. As the palms fronds lie discarded on the ground we enter this strange, reflective silence of Holy Week where again we will hear the story of God's extravagant love, for every person and for all of creation.

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.

From sundaysandseasons.com.

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