

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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April 5, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Attached is a bulletin for your devotion and worship. It is consistent with the components of worship that John Calvin insisted must be present in Reformed worship.

It is my prayer and the prayer of your session that these worship and devotional aids will nourish you during this time that we cannot be together.

You will find these Components of Reformed Worship in bold:

**Open with a moment of personal Prayer*

The Invocation The Word

**After reading the scripture sing a hymn or sing along with a hymn*

The Sermon The Affirmation of Faith The Offering

**Read a psalm aloud as your offering to God. A suggestion is provided below.*

The Benediction

All of these components are on the insert. If you read through each in the order above, you will have moved through the rhythm of a traditional Reformed worship service. You should feel free to intersperse songs of praise, Psalm readings and personal prayer. Suggested places to do this are indicated at the asterisk (*) above.

Our prayer is that this will prove nourishing to your Spiritual health.

Yours in
Christ,

Pastor
Alan

For your convenience, songs and a Psalm are recommended below:

All Glory Laud and Honor — Hymn Number 265

Hosanna, Loud Hosanna — Hymn Number 267

Dear FPC Saints,

Last week I posted a video sermon on Facebook and an audio sermon on our web page. In addition you received a devotional page in newsletter form along with the instruction sheet and this letter. I heard that the voice quality on Facebook was hard to understand. I'll try again this week however I'm learning that some of my equipment is not current enough to do quality video. I contacted a friend who works for Apple and learned that my computer is too old to do a number of the things he would recommend. I will keep trying with what I have and we will all pray together that the events that are keeping us apart will be over soon and we can resume to a more normal way of worshipping together.

Expect a Maundy Thursday devotional this week. I'm trying to follow the normal course of worship and events that we would have if there were no extenuating circumstances. Also, please continue to pray for the wisdom and discernment for all of our leaders. There is no templet for the many decisions that need to be made during this outbreak.

My prayers are with each of you. Take a moment this week to think of someone in the church who you have not spoken to or seen for some time and give them a call. Such a gesture will interrupt the isolation for both you and the one you call. And, be sure to pray with them on the phone - God is listening for the concerns of His people: ***Oh, God, you are our comfort and our strength!***

Peace and God's
Blessings,

Pastor
Alan

TODAY'S WORSHIP

In Service to our Lord | First Presbyterian Church | Arcadia, FL

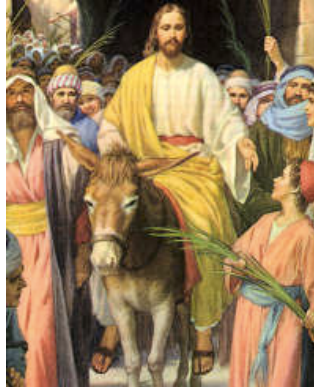
Invocation

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." (*Psalms 118:1-2*)

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the course of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. — (*Psalms 118:26-29*)

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, in whom there is no partiality, we confess that our love is limited to those with whom we choose to associate. Our faith is restricted to what we can prove and our service is reduced by our greater interest in trappings and success. We have allowed religion to become a compartment in our lives, rather than leaven that influences and transforms the whole. O God forgive our unfaithfulness and make today a time of new beginnings. In Jesus name. Amen.



HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!

Of course Palm Sunday begins with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. There is an indelible image in our mind of Jesus riding a donkey while the people cover his path with Palm branches and coats. Even the shout of the crowd rings in our ears whenever we hear it is Palm Sunday: ***"Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the***

name of the Lord."

As soon as those images and shouts die down, however, the scripture moves quickly. First to the incident with the Fig tree, then to the Temple where Jesus drives out the money changers and turns over the tables. To the chagrin of the religious leaders present, he shouts to everyone within earshot: ***"My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers."*** You can imagine that didn't go over that well with those in charge.

Now Jesus enters the temple and begins to teach. You might say that Jesus was 'begging the question', and it wasn't long before the question came. The Bible records the words of those leaders as Jesus entered the temple after his encounter with the moneychangers, it says, ***the chief priests and the elders asked, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"***

Great question! They are sure they have Jesus trapped and will soon accuse him of blasphemy! He knows his authority has come from God the Father and he has said so before. Now, they expect him to say the same and when he does they've got him!

But the question doesn't go as planned. Instead, Jesus asks a question of his own: ***By whose authority did John baptize?*** Now the tables have been turned. If they say by God's authority then Jesus will say, 'Then why do you not listen to him' and if they say by his own authority they fear what the crowds will do to them because they regard John as a Prophet.

You might say the tables have been turned. Just when the scribes and religious leaders thought they had Jesus were they wanted him, things changed. Now they are on the hot-seat with no way out.

It began with a questioning of Jesus' authority, then Jesus used John's authority as a question to turn the table. Apparently,

Affirmation of Faith

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He taketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I was thought the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anoints my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen. (Psalm 23)

Benediction

Romans 12:9-10

HATE what is *evil*;
cling to what is *good*
BE devoted to one
another in *love*
HONOR one another
above *yourselves*

ROMANS 12:9-10

**Go now in peace,
and peace be with you all.**

authority is a big deal.

As some of you know I formerly owned a detective agency. If I asked someone to canvas a neighborhood they were almost always reluctant to do it. The idea of knocking on doors and asking strangers questions is intimidating. But, once those same people finished the training and received a 'Detective Identification Card' they became confident to do that very work - it was like night and day. Now, they had the authority to ask and most people would honor the authority and answer the best they could.

The same was true in Jesus day. The people listened to John because they believed he as a prophet. They listened to Jesus because they believed what he said, and he said that he was from God. But now we must remember that religious leaders are God's workers and if John is a prophet and Jesus is from God then they should be listening. In other words, John and Jesus have more authority than they do!!

Well this is Palm Sunday and we know where this all leads. With authority comes power and the religious leaders intend to protect their power. John is already out of the picture and not a threat anymore to their authority. The only thing between them and the power they crave now and enjoyed in the past, is Jesus. We will watch again the drama that will play out over the next five days until they finally get their wish. They don't know it now, but its the seventh day they have to watch out for!

From Palm Sunday to Easter is Holy Week. It is what some call slow-time. While we take the entire length of Jesus' earthly ministry and squeeze it into a year long cycle (we call the Liturgical Year) this one week slows that all down and brings us into real time. In some traditions everyday has its own theme: Palm Sunday, Holy Monday (Spy Monday), Tenebrae, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Vigil (Prayer) Saturday and Easter Sunday.

It is on that final day, on Easter Sunday, when the final authority and power of our Lord is established. If you pay attention on that day you will hear the final words of our Lord to his disciples from this gospel. They are words that return us to the question of Palm Sunday: ***All authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me.***

Use this entrance into Holy Week to slow down, take a moment each day to focus on events that lead to the revelation of who Christ is: ***Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is name of the one who has come in the name of the Lord!***

Let us Pray: Gracious God, we pray today that you would give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear your message to us. We acknowledge that your ways are beyond our grasp or understanding, yet we pray that you give us confidence to witness to the awesome acts that are all around us. Grant that today's storms pass, that the world opens its eyes to you and that Peace is known, through your love and grace.
Amen.

First Presbyterian Church, Arcadia
PALM SUNDAY — “**IN THE GARDEN**”
April 5, 2020 Pastor Alan Adams

The Biblical story of Palm Sunday is found in all four gospels. John 18 is the shortest with just one verse, then right on to Judas’s Betrayal. Luke’s version in Chapter 22 is the most famous with its fanfare of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Mark and Matthew are almost identical with their accounts of Jesus in the Garden, and the disciples who could not stay awake. The one glaring difference is a verse in Matthew’s version: ***the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.***

No matter which one you read, these are not easy stories, and they are not pleasant stories. The closest we get to ‘easy’ or ‘pleasant’ is Luke’s Triumphal Procession with the Palms, the coats, and the shouts of ***Hosanna in the Highest: Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!*** Maybe that explains why we so often focus on that story on Palm Sunday. Maybe we’d rather keep things as pleasant as possible for as long as we can. The truth is, even in Luke, the pleasant fanfare is pretty short-lived!

A close friend of mine came to faith after I had know him for some years. After he turned his life over to Christ he told me that he intended to read the Bible from cover to cover. He (rightly) thought that would be a good place to begin his Christian journey. He began in Genesis, read through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. He even managed to get most of the way through Judges before he called one day to say how surprised he was. Suddenly, he was confronted (as many are) with the realization that the Bible can be a very violent book. I think he was shocked to find so much violence in such a holy place.

But there it is: death and violence; pain, suffering and human anguish. To the new convert who is reading to understand ‘God’s love’, these stories may seem as out of place as a golf ball in your cereal bowl.

World renowned psychologist, Jordan Peterson, says this: *Life is suffering. The antidote to suffering is meaning. And the way to get meaning is through responsibility.*

As out-of-place as it seems in the Bible, suffering is a part of life. And, if you read the Bible, you will find it. There it is, and it’s there to show us that God is here! In our lives, in our suffering, and in our anguish. The truth is, the world is like that and our lives are like that too. For God to be in our lives, He must also be in our suffering: in the dirty stuff—up to His elbows!

I don’t know about you, but it helps me to know that: to know that God is not only a God of Triumphal Entries, but also a God in the hard times and places. God is in North Korea, in Iran, in Syria. God is there in in the school shootings and the bridge collapses and the ugly politics we sometimes witness. A few years ago a book called *The Shack* became immensely popular. There have been Bible studies fashioned around it. It has also taken lots of criticism because of its depiction of God. Nevertheless, in the end, it’s worth reading, because it is about God in the messiest of messy places.

Perhaps that is the greatest message of the Bible: that God is not withdrawn from us; that God is not oblivious to us; that God is not indifferent to us; and that God is not removed from us! Perhaps the message that we are to hear in the Bible is that there is no part of life (anywhere in history) exempt from God’s love, involvement and sovereignty. Perhaps the message is that there is no part of our lives, no matter how bleak or evil or distasteful, where God is not weaving into the fabric of our lives the pattern of the cross.

I think this is the message of the agony of Christ in the Garden: that God is determined never to ask anyone to be more alone than He was; to be more frightened than He was; to be more helpless than He was; to be more anxious than He was. You see, the cross is a demonstration of the absolute physical pain Christ suffered and the Garden is a demonstration of the absolute emotional anguish that Christ suffered. For us, Christ has faced the consequences, suffered the dreams-gone-wrong, and tasted the bitterness of human suffering. ***I am deeply grieved, even to death,*** he says to His disciples. ***Remain here and stay awake with me.*** They couldn't do it.

In the movie *"The Apostle"*, actor Robert Duvall plays the main character, a preacher named Sonny. In one scene Sonny is in his bedroom at three in the morning arguing with God. His whole world seems to be crashing in around him, and he paces the floor shouting louder and louder until he wakes up the neighbors. Sonny shouts, *"How can you let this happen to me, God? What have I ever done to you? You know ever since I was a boy, you've always called me Sonny — and I've always called you Jesus!"*

You see, Sonny was doing what Jesus was doing. Bringing his suffering and anguish before God. In our world we are more likely to live "the cover up". To pretend that we don't hurt; to deny our problems; to avoid dealing with the grief. Jesus wants us to know that "silence is a conspiracy orchestrated by the devil." Second Corinthians 12:9 says: ***God's Grace is sufficient for the challenges God gives each of us.***

A woman named Doris went to counseling when she was in her forties. She introduced herself as one who had lost her husband through a long and painful illness. In less than a year her mother died, as well, and suddenly Doris felt all alone and afraid of the future. She was frightened and tentative. Doris was living scared! In the course of her counseling she discovered that she was very "angry and afraid" of God! Somehow she felt that God had failed to protect her, in fact, was picking on her, and she was frightened by what God might do next. The counselor suggested that she close her eyes and have a conversation with God. She was to pray—really pray. First, she was to tell God exactly how she felt—express the anger and betrayal, disappointment and hurt, and her fear of the future. After she had done that she was asked to "give to herself" the response she expected God would offer her. After a few seconds of silence Doris spoke almost exactly what God had spoken to Job.

Doris, I am God. My ways and powers are so vast that even if I could explain them to you, you would not feel the comfort you think you would get by understanding. But I do love you. I have put no more upon your shoulders than is given to all humans to bear. The death of loved ones — it will come to all. But there is much that is good in the future for you. I invite you to open your arms and receive it, knowing always that "I am here."

When it was over Doris said two things:

She said she felt clean and honest for the first time in months.

And she said she was glad that she was not "pretending" anymore.

Out of Doris's mouth she spoke on behalf of God and said, *"Not my will, but Thy will be done, Lord."* You see, Doris had discovered a "cross-shaped design" woven into the fabric of our lives.

Can you see it? Do you know that God is here? That God stands with you? That's why the people are celebrating. That's what all the fanfare is about! That's why the palms and the coats and the Hosannas! Hosanna means, "God Save Us!"

On Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday) we discover what Doris discovered and what Jesus knew:
There is life after pain.
There is life after hurt.
There is even life after death.

You see, against our pain God promises ***life more abundant.***
Against our hurt He says, ***I will always be with you...(even to the ends of the earth).***
Against our death He promises, ***“...that whosoever believes in me shall not perish, but have eternal life.”***

Friends, I encourage you to find your own garden this summer. Stand eye to eye with God and leave your deepest burden, your deepest pain, your deepest hurt at the base of the cross —at the feet of Jesus in the Garden.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, on this Passion Sunday help us to remember the hours before Jesus's death. Hours when He was deeply grieved and demonstrated to us how to bring such grief and pain before God and our community. Let us be like Jesus, speaking to God eye to eye, ever mindful of the cross that you have woven into the fabric of our lives, as a symbol of your unending grace. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.