



Guildwood Community Presbyterian Church
140 Guildwood Parkway, Scarborough, Ontario
M1E 1P4

**Worship for Guildwood Community Presbyterian Church,
April 5, 2020**

Dear Friends,

As this time of physical distancing continues indefinitely, once again we provide for you some materials that would have been used in our regular communal worship, had that been possible. If you know of anyone who would appreciate receiving a copy, please let Lisa in the office know and we will make sure that they get one. You can leave a message at (416-261-4037). And in the meantime, we continue to be with you in prayer. Stay well.

Rev. Helen Smith

Opening Hymn

Book of Praise - 214 "All glory, laud and honour"

YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhbYS31TYbs> ← click this link

- video with on-screen lyrics
- recorded on Palm Sunday in 2016 at [First-Plymouth Congregational Church](#); Lincoln, Nebraska

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Gracious God, this day we remember how Jesus entered into Jerusalem to the sound of joyful shouts. May we too praise you this day, wherever we are and in whatever we are doing.

In these days of isolation, we sometimes get caught up in ourselves. Forgive us for faith that can be shallow, for forgetfulness and fickleness, for timidity, for making ready excuses for going our own way and claiming it as yours. Turn us around again, we pray, by your Holy Spirit, active within us and among us even when we are apart. Show us how to be open again to your faithfulness and to your freedom, that we may live new lives and be again bearers of the seeds of the Kingdom of Jesus.

We pray in his name, and continue to pray together as he taught:

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

Declaration of Pardon

God speaks through God's prophets: I make all things new. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Thanks be to God.

The Peace

Jesus said: I have come that you may have life in abundance.
The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Scripture

[Matthew 21: 1-11](#) ← this links to on-line text of the NRSV bible
[Click here](#) for additional scripture readings from today's lectionary. Links courtesy of the [Revised Common Lectionary](#), a project of the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Sermon

About this time last year
we were watching the Raptors in their winning season
make their run for the championship.
And what a run it was!
And then do you remember that day in June
when the whole country celebrated —
when people crammed into downtown Toronto
and cheered the team as they made their way to City Hall
on the top deck of double decker buses —
so many people it took a while to get the whole parade going —
In these days of physical distancing it seems like that was eons ago.

Charles Dickens, in his book A Tale of Two Cities,
talks about another parade in eighteenth century Paris.
It was the time of the French Revolution.

This parade was made up of a procession of wooden carts
carrying doomed and innocent victims of the conflict,
their only crime being their parentage.
They moved on to their death.
People shouted with contempt,
the air was filled with hate,
and the women knitting at the base of the guillotine
counted the heads as they fell.

On that first Palm Sunday,
the crowd cheered, just like we cheered the Raptors.
Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead,
his popularity was at an all time high.
They waved their palm branches,
just as we waved our Raptors flags.
It was common practice in the ancient world
to welcome home a king or war hero
by laying out a path of branches for him to ride or walk on,
similar to the way we talk about rolling out the red carpet,
for Hollywood royalty
or like, as legend has it,
Sir Walter Raleigh put down his cloak
for Queen Elizabeth 1 to walk on.
Back in the day palm branches were a sign of rejoicing.
They evoke the celebratory Feast of Booths,
during which worshippers processed around the temple altar,
rejoicing by waving branches,
reminders of the Exodus (Leviticus 23: 40-43).
The palm branches signal the people's joyful hopes that, like Moses,
Jesus will lead a new exodus
and deliver them from their bondage to the Romans.
"Hosanna" — the crowd shouted —
"Now save us —
save us from these wicked Romans
who take all our money in taxes
and give us little if anything in return.
Save us. Hosanna."
Today we might be likely to cry out — "Save us from Covid19".

But was this a victory parade? —
or was it more like the one in Dicken's book? —
a trip to the gallows, a march of tragedy, a march to death.
John's gospel records Thomas,
when he hears Jesus wants to go to Jerusalem,
and he knows the heat is on —
(actually the raising of Lazarus also brought out
more official opposition to Jesus) —
Thomas, in the vein of Eeyore the donkey, says —
"Let's all go down there and die together."

A victory parade?

Yes, sort of, but not the way the crowd would have it.
The crowd wants a military victory over the hated Romans —
wants that kind of a saviour, that kind of a Messiah.
A white knight on a white horse.

They wanted some glorious political king on a war-horse
to ride into Jerusalem and sweep the Romans out of power.
When a king rode in on a horse it meant war.
When a king rode in on a donkey, he rode in peace.
Jesus rode a donkey — a colt, the foal of a donkey.
He came for peace; he came for healing and wholeness.
He was a suffering servant and not a triumphant king.
It is clear that Jesus is not playing the game their way.
Maybe that is why the cries so quickly changed
from Hosanna, Save us!
to Crucify! Kill him!
Here is an excellent example of mob mentality.

Even the disciples seemed to give allegiance one day
and abandon Jesus the next.
They basked in the glory of Christ's presence and teaching,
but when things got tense, they disappeared.
Peter, who had earlier defiantly declared,
"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God",
that same Peter, the night of Jesus' arrest,
would declare just as defiantly — "I never knew him."

One close friend, Judas, betrayed him,
Peter denied him,
and after his arrest in the garden they all fled,
bailing out of what looked to be a sinking ship.

The crowd hailed Jesus as king —
and then cried out to crucify him — is this the same group?
Did they have a quick change of mind and heart
when Jesus didn't live up to their expectations
of a quick fix from the oppressive Romans?

A quick fix — isn't that what we all want.
God to push the button that will make everything okay.
That will make this blasted virus disappear,
clean up our struggles in relationships,
solve our financial difficulties.

That is called the prosperity gospel.

But that is not the way God works.

God has another way.

God comes as the suffering servant about whom Isaiah speaks.

The one who moves to the cross.

The one who is despised and rejected, a person of suffering,
the one who is wounded for our transgressions,
and by whose bruises, we are healed.

God in Christ moves to the cross to bring life.

Such a fickle crowd —

perhaps a bit like us —

giving allegiance to Jesus one day

and then turning on him the next —

to deny, to betray, to cry out crucify him.

And even if it is not the same crowd —

what happened to those people

who supported Jesus on Palm Sunday —

who hailed him,

spread their cloaks and palms on the road? Where
were they when Christ appeared before Pilate?

Where were they when Pilate gave the crowd

the choice to let Jesus go — or let Barabbas go —

and they chose Barabbas.

Why do the city's crowds turn on Jesus so soon,
after a few days?
For those who understood the Messiah was to come
with military conquest and fantastic prosperity
it wouldn't take long for them to decide
that the rabbi from Nazareth is a disappointing imposter —
particularly after he is seized and imprisoned by the Romans.
But Jesus had an even deeper, more enduring form of liberation in mind.

God's ways are not our ways —
the week of the passion story is a clear indication of that
and it starts with Palm Sunday.
We would take salvation, wholeness, abundant life
with a quick fix, a mighty army —
or as our neighbours to the south would say —
send in the marines.
But in God's way abundant living means going against the grain.
Changing things up —
you know how some of our younger members
show us how we can make
the palms of this day into crosses —

Changing things up.

God's ways are not our ways. —
No magic fix.
No triumphant saviour.
Jesus shows us the way can be hard work,
rocking the boat, going against the grain —
opens himself to suffering, to persecution, to betrayal,
to being killed because of his countercultural teaching and action.
So we are called to sacrifice,
to give of our riches,
to care for one another —
so we are called to physically distance —
not to keep just ourselves safe — to keep everyone safe.
Called to do what we can —
even if it means being bored lying on the couch —
There have been some funny tweets around these days —
like the one that says
"My mother said I wouldn't amount to anything,
and here I am, lying on the couch
and saving the world".

It is a very holy mystery —
 this way of life that Jesus models,
 this parade that marches forward to a cross.

It is a reminder too that we can be fickle like the crowd.
 We can learn all about Jesus, get all gung ho,
 cry out our hosannas,
 then find out we will have to change —
 find out this discipleship might cost us something,
 it might mean we get counter cultural —
 go against the grain —
 so we back off —
 and say — well, maybe not, Jesus.

Maybe we are not willing to give up some things,
 maybe we cling to our old ways.

So we deny we know him,
 we want to fit in to the mainstream,
 we don't want to be linked with him.

Or we betray him,
 because he disappointed us —
 didn't teach the easy way —
giving up his standards so that we can get 30 pieces of silver.
It is so hard for us to understand that death —
 his death — can mean life.

The good news in all of this is that Jesus did it all for all of us —
 with all our denials and betrayals and half-hearted commitment.

Jesus "borrowed" a donkey,
 rode into Jerusalem,
 had a last supper with all his disciples,
 washed all their feet,
 prayed for all of them in the garden
 and moved on to the cross
 so that they and we could have life —
 life now and forever.

Paul would write to the church in Rome —
 I am absolutely convinced that nothing can separate us
 from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

and to the church at Corinth —

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's ways aren't our ways.

So maybe the Palm Sunday parade isn't like the Raptors victory parade,
or the march to the guillotine in revolutionary France.

It is its own category —

a march to death that leads to life.

As we begin this week that is called holy,

may each day be blessed with reminders of a parade,
of a last supper,

of feet washed and prayers spoken in a garden,
of an earthquake

and a cry from a cross, "it is finished",

reminders of the strange but effective ways of sacrifice and love

in which God is still at work to bring us life. AMEN

Offertory

We remind everyone that we must continue to pay our bills; in the absence of Sunday worship, you may [sign up for pre-authorized remittance](#) (PAR), [donate online through the link on our website](#), or drop off your offering envelope in the mailbox at the church. The building will be checked daily for mail and phone messages. If you are not comfortable leaving an envelope, you are welcome to leave a phone message at the office (416.261.4037) and someone will pick up your offering.

Offertory Hymn

Book of Praise - 216 "Hosanna"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgzvVRGe7tE>

- lyrics found separately [by clicking here](#)
- video of an audio recording by [Vineyard Music](#)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Hope

Gracious, giving God, we pray with thankful hearts. We are thankful for the beauty of creation, which even during these days of isolation we can enjoy: for the song of the birds, the fresh smells after a rainfall, the crocuses emerging from the soil, the smile and wave of a neighbour. We are thankful for the phone calls from caring people, for the health care workers, for the shopkeepers, the custodians, the truck drivers, for public

servants and elected officials, for all who are working to ease the suffering of these days. We thank you for the gift of music, the gift of poetry, and drama, the gift of technology, for all that is enabling us to socially connect, while physically distancing.

Lord, may we, who are sometimes swayed by the crowd, who often avoid conflict for fear of its cost to us, hold fast to the gospel of peace and follow faithfully in your way of compassion wherever that may lead us. May we be a source of healing to all in need of your grace.

As you took the time to pray and to be silent, during these days of isolation, may our prayers, meditation and reflection draw us close to you and help us as we continue to find our way on this journey of faith.

As your ministry is a ministry of healing and wholeness, we pray for those who are ill of body, mind or soul. We pray that you would bring to them life in abundance. We pray for those who care for the sick, that you would strengthen them for the difficult days ahead. We pray for governments. Help them to find wise answers to hard questions.

As you entered Jerusalem with peace in your heart, may we live as people of peace in the face of the world's many conflicts. May we hold your vision of justice and peace before us.

Bless us, O blessed one.

As we enter into the days ahead of us, we will need your power and presence to sustain us. As we move through these difficult days together, Spirit of Love and Life, stay close. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.

Closing Hymn

Book of Praise - 217 "Ride on, ride on in majesty"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo5pfl6z6IA>

- lyrics differ slightly from the Book of Praise
- BBC TV recording at [St Mary-le-Tower Church](#); Ipswich, England

Benediction

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. AMEN ([Romans 15:13](#); NRSV)