

WILLITS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
WORSHIP GUIDE
March 24, 2024
Passion Sunday

"Nothing great is ever achieved without much enduring.
St. Catherine of Siena

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

Bringing in the Light Halle, Halle, Hallelujah

Frankie J

LENTEN CANDLES – PASSION WEEK

(L Leader) (P People)

MEDITATION: (L) The time is drawing near. The power of Jesus is that he lived what he taught, even to his death. He practiced a ministry of radical inclusivity, drawing to himself all the despised and rejected members of society. He lived what he taught, a life of justice and love, of profound compassion for all people. He lived with an abiding awareness of God, radiating the light of God in all he said and did. But that light was too much for this world. O God, his death terrifies us, because it reveals how committed the world is to its own way, and the price the world exacts from those whose commitment is to you.

(Time of silence)

(L) As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain of all the children in the world who suffer in body, mind, and spirit.

(Extinguish Christ candle)

(L) Let us pray.

(P) Loving God, there are so many choices before us every day. Choices offered by our friends, our families, our culture, our own past. Some encourage the well-being of the earth, ourselves, and our neighbors; others are destructive. Help us to distinguish between them. May we learn from the choices of Jesus and embody compassion, justice, and inclusion in all we say and do. Amen.

CENTERING WORDS: Leader

Ride on, King Jesus. Ride with passion and compassion. Ride in triumph and joy.

Ride in humility and gentleness. Ride with us as we travel the journey with you.

CALL TO WORSHIP: L is the leader **P is the people**

Leader: In joy we gather today.

People: Hosanna to Jesus, the Christ.

Leader: In remembrance, we gather this day.

People: Hosanna to the son of David.

Leader: In festive celebration and quiet reflection, we gather to worship and pray.

People: Hosanna to the Son of God.

MONEY FOR MISSIONS: Prayer of thanksgiving

HYMN: **All Glory, Laud and Honor** **#280 (vs 3 & 4)**

OPENING PRAYER – Let us pray together

Jesus, you have walked this road with us many times. Guide our steps and keep us close. Inspire our worship with your loving presence and work in our lives, that your Spirit may flow through our lives as we seek to help others walk the journey with you. Amen.

HYMN: **On Eagle's Wings** **#143 (x2)**

SCRIPTURES: **Matthew 21: 1-11** **Eric Glassey**

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was

in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

MESSAGE: Toxic Spirituality

Rosemary Landry

Today is the day that the church calls Palm Sunday. It is the day that Jesus reportedly entered the city of Jerusalem to begin what we call Holy Week;

- Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with his disciples
- Maundy Thursday is the day he has the last supper with his disciples and is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Friday is the day he is executed and
- Sunday is the day of his resurrection.

During the time of Jesus, the population of Jerusalem was estimated to be between 25,000 and 75,000 (although there is no reliable source). Passover was one of three festivals celebrated in Jerusalem with about 150-200,000 coming for the festivals. The day Jesus entered Jerusalem from the west, another procession was entering Jerusalem from the east. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate and his procession of military force came to prevent any rebellions. Can you imagine the thunderous sound of hundreds of soldiers on foot and horseback? This ominous parade of force must have been pretty sobering. There were no shouts of hallelujah as Pilate entered the city. But on the other side of the city, as Jesus entered Jerusalem, there are shouts of hallelujah.

When you look at the Gospels, there are a lot of differences in this story. It can be confusing and then we ask, who do we believe? Maybe all of them.

- Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written 60-70 years after the event.
- Gospel of John was written 70-80 years after the event.
- And the Gospel of Mark was written about 50 years after the event.

You see, some theologians believe that Jesus followers were interpreting their memories of the experience through their own Jewish scriptures and traditions. They were trying to make sense of what happened, Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion and of the resurrection. For each of them, certain events probably stuck in their memory, or some details were more important than others. It’s impossible to determine the historical details some 2 centuries after it happened. But we do know that there were 2 parades. So, what does Palm Sunday mean to us today? Let me share some thoughts with you and you decide what it means to you personally. The image of Jesus in contrast to the image of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate gives us a choice. Pilate is the model of domination that we still see today; oppression, greed, bullying, retaliation, the use of force and violence, power and control that still prevails in our world today. Or we can choose to follow the procession led by Jesus. The dominion – the rule of God - does not come from oppression, but from love. Leadership calls for grace. The rule of God calls us to servanthood.

For the people in Jerusalem, Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, is a day of joy and celebration. For one reason, some thought Jesus was the political king that would free them from the domination of the Roman rule. The political and religious leaders are feeling threatened. The people are jubilant. But as the week goes by, the joy, the hope, and the Hosanna's are replaced with cynicism.

Let's jump to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday; the days that Jesus is arrested and executed. Why did Jesus have to die? Because he was perceived as a threat to the value system of the Roman Empire and the religious hierarchy of his day. He was considered an insurrectionist. Jesus was executed by the method that they used to execute violent insurrectionists. Crucifixion was not just a way of executing someone, but of torturing them. Archaeologists discovered the bones of a crucified man that points to the feet not on the front of the cross (like we often see), but nailed with their ankles on either side of the cross. The nails were through the sides of their ankles and into the cross. The other nails didn't go through his hands. A neurologist has suggested that their hands were probably clenched because where the nail went through the wrist would have caused damage to the median nerve, which controls the thumb and fingers.

The domination system of Jesus time was based on the idea that society works best if one group of people are in control and other groups are subservient. A culture of domination has always ridiculed, mocked, and persecuted those who call the system into question. Which is what Jesus did. Domination systems survive by repressing and rejecting those who question the system. Jesus was a threat to this system of oppression. But what really surprised them was that Jesus, who came from peasant background, was (by some) being called the Messiah; the one who would bring peace, justice and love to all people. This would lead to giving the people false hope. Jesus' teachings were the exact opposite of how the Roman rulers and religious leaders world worked. Jesus was focused on how to live in accordance to God's values. Everyone would be treated as equals – in every way; spiritually, politically, and economically. There would be equal distribution of resources, no one would be an enemy of another, and justice would be for everyone. Jesus was a threat to their system of oppression. They were afraid that believing Jesus was the Messiah, a king, would create a revolt by the people. Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan put it the best way I've ever heard:

“Most scholars don't believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world, but because of the sins of the world.”

Many, if not most Christians, have been taught what is called the “substitutionary sacrificial atonement theory”. Basically, that belief says that Jesus needed to die on the cross because humans are evil, and we are beyond help. We need a divine savior. But think about it; this view contradicts what we read about humanity and creation. We read in Genesis 1: 26 ***“Let us make humans in our image,***

according to our likeness". In Genesis 1: 9 after all was created, we read, ***"And God saw that it was good."***

This is what Rev. Brett Myers calls "toxic spirituality" – that God is portrayed by religious leaders as cruel; a God who created us in God's own likeness and then demands the murder of Jesus because of how bad we are. Theologians Borg and Crossan ask: (quote) "Was the death of Jesus the will of God? No. It is never the will of God that a righteous man be crucified." (unquote). Many of us believe that God has unconditional love for humanity and God's creation. That God we believe in doesn't demand that anyone but ourselves to be responsible for our choices; that God respects us and affirms our free will. If we look at Jesus death through the lens of heaven and hell, we focus on Jesus saving the world through his death. Jesus was not focused on meeting us in heaven. Rather, Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John focus on Jesus' teachings about creating justice for the oppressed, being the example of love, and peace with justice. Over the centuries we have corrupted God's image because we have believed that someone else needed to be sacrificed for us. The easy way is to simply follow doctrines and creeds about God and Jesus. But Jesus wanted his disciples and those he was teaching to think critically about their faith – for themselves. Jesus was always questioning authorities, both political and religious. Sometimes thinking for ourselves is a lot harder than simply believing what others tell you. Jesus was always reinterpreting his own religious tradition. In Matthew 5: 38-40 we read.... ***"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'*** (then he flips it around and says) ***But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also, and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give your coat as well."***

So, what do we make of Good Friday, with the execution of Jesus, if we no longer believe Jesus was put to death for our sins? What if it doesn't make sense to us anymore? We don't need to observe the violence of Good Friday. We do have to remember that the world we live in isn't so different as their world. We live in a world that is characterized by the domination systems; whether it be war, climate change, political gridlock, sex and child trafficking, immigrants called vermin, starvation, genocide, gun violence, hunger, poverty, attacks on our education system and so much more. What is happening in our world is because we are people in need of saving. If we want to follow Jesus' way, we must celebrate, forgive, love and embrace those who are different and may have opposing views. When Jesus walked the earth, He healed by being inclusive and relational. If we believe that God is in each of us, we need to be willing to see them in that light. Yes, those who do wrong must be confronted, but in the process, we must seek reconciliation and healing. Our salvation doesn't come from Jesus' death on the cross but from our willingness to be active, rather than passive participants in the healing of all of creation and with our brothers and sisters. We

remember what Jesus asks of us in 1 John 4:20: ***“Those who say, “I love God,” and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”***

To love God is an empty love if we don't love others. Not a warm and fuzzy emotional love – but love in our actions toward them.

So I leave you with a question this week: If we don't believe that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins, what will the resurrection mean for you?

HYMN: Bind Us Together #2226 (x2)

Please remain seated as we prepare our hearts for prayer

PASTORAL PRAYERS:

Prayers of the People

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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

OFFERTORY: DOXOLOGY: Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God all creatures here below. Praise God above ye heavenly host. Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Offering Prayer:

We thank you Christ Jesus for your faithfulness. Bless these gifts we return to you now, that they may guide others to follow you and walk humbly in your ways. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Monday	Prayer Team	10 am	Zoom
Wednesday	Book study	Noon	Bring lunch

HYMN: The Servant Song #2222 (vs 1, 3, 4)

BENEDICTION:

Go this week into God's world, humble and kind. Be faithful, courageous and true. Be gracious and loving as you bring Christ's peace to our community this week.

SHALOM: Shalom to you now, Shalom my friends. May God's full mercies, bless you my friends. In all your living and through your loving, Christ be your Shalom, Christ be your Shalom.

