

Call to Worship

Palm Sunday

1 April 2007

J. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!

L. O give thanks to God, for God is good; God's steadfast love endures forever!

J. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

L. This is God's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

J. This is the day that God has made let us rejoice and be glad in it.

L. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God.

J. We bless you from the house of God.

L. You are our God, and we will give thanks to you; you are our God, we will extol you.

J. O give thanks to God, for God is good, for God's steadfast love endures forever.

L. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!

Call to Confession

Palm Sunday

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Hosanna!

Many thanks to the children, youth and all that worked to “prepare the way” this morning!

Hosanna!

Today we meet Jesus on the way.

He had recently raised Lazarus from the dead, had blessed the little children that the disciples had tried to drive away. He had healed a blind man who then became a follower, and Jesus had called Zacchaeus, the reviled tax collector, out of the tree he was in to see this Jesus and invited himself to Zacchaeus' house where Zacchaeus agreed to give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back by 4 times those he had defrauded.

Very soon Jesus will take on those who have turned the Temple, the house of God, into a shopping mall – an expensive religious Disneyland, Jesus will overturn tables and drive out the sellers and the buyers. Jesus will teach in the temple. He will continue to challenge the domination system. He will celebrate Passover with his disciples. Jesus will go to the garden of Gethsemane where the disciples can't keep watch and fall asleep. Judas will betray him with a kiss, then Jesus will be arrested, tortured, mocked and crucified at Golgotha.

Jesus is on the way from the stable of his birth in Bethlehem to the cross and beyond.

We can still hear the echoes of Isaiah and the voice of John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord!”

Today we see Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem for the Passover feast amid his many followers, the disciples, those he has healed, and those whose lives he has transformed. (Passover, since its' beginning in Egypt, was active defiance to oppression. It celebrated liberation but also celebrated the struggle.)

In procession the whole multitude gathers around Jesus in this deliberate and daring demonstration against the empire and sings, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

And Jesus calls us, too, to join in and follow.

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, in the book, "The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus' Final Week in Jerusalem" remind us that there were actually two processions during Passover.

"One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. Jesus' procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate's proclaimed the power of the empire. Pilate's military procession was a demonstration of both Roman imperial power and Roman imperial theology.

Jesus' procession embodied an alternative vision, the kingdom of God. Pilate's procession was the procession of the domination system of the early first century. Jesus' procession deliberately countered the domination system of the Roman Empire and its' collaborators.

The two processions embody the central conflict of the week that led to Jesus' crucifixion."

Domination systems are still a controlling force in Jerusalem and the West Bank and the rest of the world as well. The domination system of military power and violence, the domination system of economic oppression, and the domination system of human degradation ravage the world.

Jesus calls us to reject the domination system and repent of our culture's sin of greed, violence, war, executions, oppression of the poor, destruction of the planet and imperialism – and to walk the way of nonviolence and prepare for God's reign of peace.

God has given us the freedom to choose. When we choose to be cruel, to be apathetic, to demean, to hate, to destroy – we choose the way of death.

But when we choose the Way of God, the Way of Life – to respect, to care, to encourage, to heal, to love – we invite God to partner with us.

To join Jesus daring procession we need to be willing to step forward in faith and with hope;

to begin a journey which requires open eyes and open hearts;

to be willing to wrestle with our doubts and fears, our anxiety and frustration;

to defy logic when the road to Jerusalem looks too challenging and seems too difficult.

Taking that first step on the journey is an act of faith.

Taking the second step is an act of hope.

God has given us the freedom to choose, and throughout our lives we come to this crossroads of choice again and again.

So which procession have you joined? Are you among the members of Pilate's procession proclaiming the strength of the domination system through your life choices and actions? Or are you among the members of Jesus' daring procession proclaiming the vision of the kingdom of God?

Jesus has lived the example, preparing a way for us to follow to Jerusalem, to the cross of pain, suffering and death, and beyond - to new life.

With the help of God, for God is with us, and the gift of community to sustain us, we are called like Jesus to faithfully follow God, to love and serve others, to seek justice, to resist evil, to embrace faith and hope and love, to heal the world.

May we all continue to search our hearts and actions for faithful living, costly discipleship, and love filled service.

Let us join together in our prayer of confession.

Words of Assurance

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Let us find our assurance in these words adapted from the book of Zechariah chapter 9.

Shout and cheer, brothers!
Raise the roof sisters!

Your ruler is coming, a good ruler who will make things right, a humble one riding a donkey.

This leader will say, "I've had it with war – no more chariots in Ephraim, no more war horses in Jerusalem, no more swords and spears, bows and arrows.

This leader, our savior Jesus, commands peace to the nations, "No more Bradley tanks or grenade launchers in Iraq, no more Apache helicopters in Colombia, no more automatic weapons in our inner cities, no more handguns in our schools, no more anti-personnel mines, no more cluster bombs, and no more nuclear weapons anywhere!

Peace will be given to the nations, a peace worldwide from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Passing of the Peace

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Yes, Jesus calls us forward to a life that is new.

We strive and sometimes struggle as sisters and brothers for that new life, and we move forward together each blessed by this community of faith.

Let us stand now in thankfulness for this community and greet each other saying,

"God's peace be with you."