



**Seacliff Uniting
Church**
Online Worship & Electronic Resources
Number 2 April 5th 2020



Celebration of Worship
Seacliff UC-Lent – Palm Sunday

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

This is the day the Lord has made
Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Come, let us give thanks to God,
whose mercy lasts forever.
*Let us enter the gates of righteousness
and offer thanks to God who has saved us.*

This is the day the Lord has made
Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone
*God has done this,
and it is marvellous o behold.*

This is the day the Lord has made
Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

PRAYER

Holy God,
most awesome is your friendship,
most wondrous is your self-giving.
We come with the sweet-sour mood
of Palm Sunday in mind and heart.
We come not in spite of the looming shadow of the cross
but because of it.
We come praising you for the grief-joy of your Christ,
for the loving determination
with which he fulfilled his terrible-wonderful mission
to seek and save the lost.
We come adding our hosanna to the millions of voices,
past and present, who have entered into the liberty

which came at such high cost.

God of Jesus, we adore you;
O give us grace to love you more!
Through Christ our Saviour.
Amen

ENCOUNTERING

BIBLE READINGS: Zechariah 9:9-10 & Matthew 21:1-11

MESSAGE: “Love Brings Peace”

The name Mildred Lisette Norman may not mean much to anyone here but in her home country, the USA, she is quite famous. Only she is not famous under her own name, rather, she is known as the Peace Pilgrim. On January 1st 1953 she set out to walk across America in the name of peace. And she walked across the USA for 28 years. The only possessions she had were the clothes on her back and what she could carry in her pockets. She would never ask for assistance but simply walked until she was offered food and shelter. Her message was a simple one: overcome evil with good, hatred with love and falsehood with truth. Tragically, she was killed in a car accident on the way to a speaking engagement in 1981.

What has that got to do with Palm Sunday? To understand the connection we need to go back and revisit an event unencumbered by layers of tradition and expectation.

In the time of Jesus, Jerusalem had a population estimated to be between 40-70,000. To keep order the city was occupied by Roman forces which would be reinforced at festival time. At Passover, perhaps the biggest festival, these troops would arrive in the city from the west. There would be a procession, led by the governor with all the trappings of imperial power. It was designed to be a show of force and strength. It was designed to intimidate.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, he came in from the East. I wonder if it was on the same day as the Roman procession. As he entered he performed the first of two prophetic acts, that is, riding on donkey's colt. (The other act was the cleansing of the temple: John 2:13-24) A prophetic act is intended to make a point, it conveys some deeper meaning. What was Jesus wanting to convey?

The meaning of this act becomes clear when we realize Jesus was deliberately acting out a passage from the prophet Zechariah: *“See your king comes to you.. gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”* (Zech 9:9) Zechariah goes on to talk about the removal of chariots, war horses and the destruction of weapons. Then he says, *“He shall command peace to the nations.”*

What Jesus was doing in entering Jerusalem in the manner he did was making a statement about peace. He was choosing a well-known symbol to say that he was coming to bring a kingdom of peace. When kings came on horses it meant war. When they came on donkeys they were coming in peace. By riding a donkey Jesus was proclaiming he was bringing a kingdom of peace. Was this a deliberate contrast to procession from west?

What Jesus was doing in effect was organizing a Peace Rally, a Peace March, a Peace Demonstration. The one who at birth was proclaimed Prince of Peace, who promised peace to his followers, who said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers”*, was making the boldest statement of intent; he was a person of peace.

Jesus taught often about existing in peace with others. He spoke of loving one's enemies: "*You have heard*" he reminded the crowd, "*that it was said, 'Love your neighbour', but I say to you, 'Love your enemies.'*" It's easy to love your own, people like us. But Jesus calls us to extend that to those unlike us. Jesus commended others with the words, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called children of God.*" He warned others, "*All who live by the sword will perish by the sword.*"

As a peace party in Palestine, the Jesus movement rejected the violence of Rome and violent retaliation on Rome. The people of God were not to seek their strength through force of arms or violence. Faithfulness to the God of peace requires us to walk in the way of peace.

For its first 300 years the Christian Church well understood this call of Jesus and was a pacifist organization. It knew that to follow the way of Jesus meant walking in the path of peace. Even now groups such as the Quakers, Amish and Mennonites refuse to participate in conflict.

We live in what seems to me to be an increasingly violent world. We seem to constantly read of wars and terrorism. Closer to home we have home invasions, road rage and domestic violence. It seems we have an addiction to violence.

As followers of Jesus we are to seek another way, the way of peace: "*Blessed are the peacemakers*"

How then do we get back to our roots as a people called to be peacemakers? The life of peace and of peacemaking seems to me to be both an inner journey and a public, outward journey. There is the inner journey, where we struggle with our own inner violence, seeking to disarm our hearts and discover serenity. It is also an outer journey, where we struggle with the world's violence, seeking to disarm warring parties and discovering peace, justice and non-violence.

So our first resolution is to make peace with ourselves.

A few years before his death, Brazil's Archbishop Dom Helder Camara was asked, "After facing death squads, would be assassins, corporations oppressing the poor, violent government opposition, and even hostile forces within your own church, who is your most difficult opponent?" He raised his hand in air and turned it around to point at himself, specifically his heart, saying "I am my own worst enemy... here (heart) I have the greatest struggle for peace"

Peace begins within each one of us. It is the process of showing mercy to ourselves, forgiving ourselves, being compassionate to ourselves, accepting ourselves, loving ourselves. Then we radiate peace to others.

St Francis, a well-renowned person of peace, said: 'While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful you have it more fully in your heart.' The roots of all war, conflict, violence and injustice lie within us.

When we have peace within ourselves it follows then that:

We radiate peace to others.

In other words we will foster peaceful relationships between ourselves and all those we encounter. Our families, our churches, our community involvements, our social and professional world will be the places we seek to live peacefully. We commit ourselves to relate to others in peaceful ways. We will practice goodness, non-violence and purity. We will love our enemies, forgive those who hurt us, and seek reconciliation. We will respond to evil with good, hate with love. There will be times when we will be hurt and abused and we are tempted to fight back. But we will respond in peaceful ways in order that we do not add to the conflict and violence already in the world.

And then we will find:

We desire to be peacemakers in the world.

Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers.*” Not the peace lovers; peacemakers. Everyone I know is a peace lover. Nobody (well not too many) deliberately seek conflict with others. Peacemaking means involving ourselves in processes and actions that lead to peace on a world scale. Peacemakers will oppose war, resist evil, engage in active non-violence.

Our choice, as Martin Luther King Jr. said is not between violence and non-violence, it’s between non-violence and non-existence.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday makes a statement about Jesus’ intent. He also asks us to make a choice. Will I be an agent of peace or accomplice of violence? Does my life sow seeds of peace and love or bitterness and hate? Am I able to cross enemy lines to extend a hand of friendship and love to those with whom I disagree? Do I allow animosity and bitterness to fester within? Peace starts in and with me and you.

So on this Palm Sunday I invite you to join that procession of Jesus and wage an all-out campaign for peace.

LENTEN CANDLE LITURGY

As we come to the sixth Sunday of Lent,
the day we know as Palm Sunday,
we continue our journey
through the events that led up to Christ’s crucifixion.

We are nearing the end of our Lenten journey,
and as disciples of our Lord we remember the events of long ago,
when the twelve disciples entered Jerusalem with Jesus,
but then deserted him a few days later.

We remember that in our own lives, when things go well we often know God is with us,
but when we are afraid, when we are at risk, we may abandon our faith.

Jesus came to bring light to the world,
but everywhere encountered those who preferred darkness.
Jesus came to bring life to the world,
but everywhere encountered those who preferred the way of death.
Jesus came to bring peace to the world,
but everywhere encounter those who preferred conflict.

Let us pray.

*Lord, make us instruments of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O, Divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.*

Amen

RESPONDING

Prayers of the People

God our Saviour and Friend,
in spite of our outward brave faces,
inwardly in our souls we need to sometimes weep a while.

We need to weep with and for those children
who instead of enjoying a happy childhood,
know all about war, hunger, poverty, mental and physical abuse, illness and dying.

We need to weep with and for those young people
who having grown up in pleasant circumstances,
now have their hopes and ideals dashed by a cynical world.

We need to weep with and for those among the indigenous people of our land
who have lost all sense of self respect and dignity and
now are captive to a sense of futility.

We need to weep with and for refugees who have spent years in camps,
those whose families have been broken up, and
those who risk their lives in unseaworthy boats.

We need to weep with and for prisoners of conscience
who suffer deprivation and violence, and
citizens who have been tried and sentenced for crimes they did not commit.

We need to weep with and for those within the care of the church
who have been misused or exploited; and
those who have suffered emotional violence or have been sexually abused.

We need to weep with and for fellow Christians
who have lost their joy and now serve with dogged duty, and
for any pastors and priests who carry on although they feel failures.

We need to weep with and for friends or family
who are choosing paths that will lead to personal degradation, and
for any who in their misery refuse all offers of help.

We need to weep with and for you, loving God.
For you are that completely Loving One who “bears our griefs and carries our sorrows,”
not wanting a single soul to perish.
As we share a little of the grief of your costly love,
may we also participate in your outreach among those around us.

Through Christ Jesus our Redeemer.
Amen!

JOURNEYING

Blessing

The way has begun.
This time next week the world will be different,
but the journey has to be travelled.
Go now and walk in the shadow of the promise
with the God who has already walked
and will walk again the same path
in the name of love.
It is a violent and disturbing week:
the heart will be torn out of the universe,
but the promise is that it will beat again.

Go and all God's peace be with you.
AMEN

FOR REFLECTION

- What kind of reception would Jesus receive if he road into Adelaide today? What would the media coverage be like? Where would he be well received? Not so well received?
- Why do you think the powers-that-be feared Jesus?
- What is the power of fear in your life, and in the life of your community?

TO PONDER

“On Palm Sunday, we are forced to remember the distance between apparent public success and personal commitment. Jesus stays the course to the end, we see, and so must we, despite all other pressures, both internal and social to the contrary. Here in the passion narrative, we trace the struggle, one scene at a time between the Word of God and the ways of the world.”

-Sr Joan Chittister, “The Liturgical Year”

- What are some of the choices we have to make between the Word of God and the ways of the world?
- What might be some of the implications of the choices we make?

"An unbelieved truth can hurt a man much more than a lie. It takes great courage to back truth unacceptable to our times. There's a punishment for it, and it's usually crucifixion."

-John Steinbeck, East of Eden, 20th century

"Let us imitate those who have gone out to meet Jesus, not scattering olive branches or garments or palms in his path, but spreading ourselves before him as best we can, with humility of soul and upright purpose."

- Andrew of Crete, 7th century