

TMUC Palm Sunday Meditation

Palm branches and snow hardly seem compatible, do they? Yet, here we, set for a snowy Palm Sunday. It is not a 'snow day' that is keeping us at home though. We are all home to stay safe in the midst of the chaos of this pandemic. We are complying – hoping that by doing so we can make a difference with our actions. We are hopeful that our actions will 'flatten the curve' and keep people safe.

The people of Jesus' day also hoped to make a difference with their actions. They wanted the world to know, they wanted the oppressive rulers of the day to know, that Jesus was here! A new day was dawning! They wanted to shout Hosanna to the one who comes in the name of God!

So Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey. People shouted Hosanna! They covered the road with palm branches and coats – it was pomp, it was ceremony, and it was comedy and circus all at the same time.

Jesus was turning the world upside down. Jesus was proclaiming a new world order – an order where everyone was welcome, where everyone was fed, where everyone mattered. What a world, what a wonderful world!

And, we who know the Easter Story know that this was just day one of Holy week.

There will be a last meal with friends, there will be prayer and denial. There will be judgement and mocking. There will be another parade as a cross is carried. There will be last words and a last breath. There will be silence.

We who are accustomed to being a community at this time of year think of these things from our own places of isolation. It is quite a change. I will miss the choir processional followed by the kids of the Sunday School. I miss looking out on your familiar faces. And yet I know that this needs to be the way it is. It is for everyone that we stay at home. If we reflect on it, maybe this is a good change, or an okay change, for us to come to Palm Sunday in this way this year. Maybe it is okay to come to Palm Sunday from the places of silence in our own homes and lives. Maybe we can have a new insight, or a different kind of knowing about the deep hope of the disciples and of Jesus as they faced an uncertain future and an immense force of oppression.

I think that I have said on occasion that as I have travelled, I have met people and congregations that are a lot like the people of Transcona Memorial. They live in a different place and they are different people but they are so filled with God's purpose and mission that I am reminded of the people here. They are the hands and feet of Christ in their place in the world as we strive to be in this, our place in the world.

Maybe today, in the Palm Sunday story from the Gospel we can meet ourselves in a different time and place. Maybe we are the people who are ever so ready for a bit of hope and change in our daily news. We are ready for healing and love.

Globally, I think that we are ready to cheer those who bring that hope to us. And, we are ready to be those people who can bring hope to others.

I am thinking of the people across the UK who at 8pm go out on their front steps, or lean from windows to applaud the workers of the National Health Service. I am thinking of people leaning out from balconies to join in song. I am thinking of people who just the other day stood on their balconies at Park City Meadows to dance and wave from their apartments of isolation. I am thinking of our friends in Manningham Uniting Church in Melbourne who are putting teddy bears in their windows and yards and inviting walkers in their neighbourhood to go on a 'Bear Hunt'. I am thinking of the teachers who are adapting lessons to video format, and museums that now have virtual visits. I am thinking of the Eiffel Tower whose lights now say 'Merci', and the Brazilian Christ the Redeemer statue who is now illuminated with the image of all the flags of the world.

We are together in this. We are united in this. And, the imaginary waving of palm branches, or the real waving of those coloured and cut out branches, can signal for us our own openness to good news and hope. Maybe a palm branch in your window this weekend and a butterfly next weekend will give a smile to someone who walks by. And, maybe we can join in the new Winnipeg Whiteout movement putting white hearts in our windows to support Health care providers and essential service workers. Maybe our own openness to hope and change and love will be the right kind of contagious in a virus filled world.

We do not know what the future will bring, but in this Gospel story, we are reminded of God's presence with us.

God is with us, we are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Let us Pray:

God,
You sojourned with the refugees fleeing Pharaoh's exploitation,
You spoke to Elijah in the small voice of stillness,
You were with the Hebrew people exiled to Babylon,
You spoke through angelic song to shepherds,
You gave courage to Jesus during 40 days in the wilderness,
You rode with him into Jerusalem, rode amongst the waving palms and shouts of hosanna,
You were there on the hill of crucifixion,
You were there, dancing in the breeze outside an empty tomb

And you are with us today, with us in our homes, with health care workers, with store clerks, with firefighters, police officers, daycare providers....with all of us wherever we are, whatever our role in this global time of COVID-19.

We are thankful God, thankful for so many who are offering healing and hope and compassion during this time

We pray for all healthcare workers, who are offering their training, their skill, their compassion and their courage to provide medical care in this unprecedented time

We pray for manufacturers who have adapted their workplaces to begin making medical supplies

We pray for people making and offering whatever useful and needed items they can

We pray for teachers helping students to continue to study and learn through online resources and through phone calls of assurance and support

WE pray for employees working in stores that are still allowed to be open to serve the public.

We pray for political leaders who are making difficult and caring decisions and offering calm and informative words and presence

WE pray for all those who have tested positive for the virus, and for the family and friends and medical people who care for them

We pray for those who grieve the deaths of family and friends from the virus

We pray for all who live with other health challenges – cancer, MS, arthritic pain, mental health struggles, We pray for all to know Your love, your healing presence, your amazing grace, God.

We pray for all citizens of this planet earth, that we may live this time with hope, with patience, with love

And that we may emerge from this time with a new sense of being one global community, of being inhabitants of one world, of sharing our stories of hope and encouragement, of being good neighbours to those near and those far away.

God, on this Palm Sunday, we prayerfully follow Jesus into the Holy City, we sing our Hosannas, we shout our faith that this one who comes in Your name, who comes humbly to bring peace and healing and love that this one, this Jesus, shows us a way to a renewed world of friendship, compassion, peace and hope.

Be with us this day and always, God

We pray in the name and spirit of Jesus the Christ
And together we join in saying the prayer he taught to his disciples:

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
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
Forever and ever. AMEN