

Ready for Lent: Ready for Now

Greenup, Cottonwood, & Lerna United Methodist Churches

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael - April 5, 2020

Palm/Passion Sunday

Readings Today: Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 27:11-54

Music Today: Hosanna, Loud Hosanna; Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed

Greeting: May the Lord be with you on this day! I pray that as we join together in worship, in whatever way we join together that we be united by one Spirit, serving one Father, in the truth of the Son. May the Lord be with us on this day! Amen.

Music: Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

- 1) Hosanna, loud hosanna, the little children sang;
Through pillared court and temple the lovely anthem rang.
To Jesus, who had blessed them close folded to His breast,
The children sang their praises, the simplest and the best.
- 2) From Olivet they followed mid an exultant crowd,
The victor palm branch waving, and chanting clear and loud.
The Lord of men and angels rode on in lowly state,
Nor scorned that little children should on His bidding wait.
- 3) "Hosanna in the highest!" that ancient song we sing,
For Christ is our Redeemer, the Lord of heaven our King.
O may we ever praise Him with heart and life and voice,
And in His blissful presence eternally rejoice!

Announcements: We will not be having services until May at the earliest. For more information, see this week's update from me. Of course, it is all available online if you check the church Facebook page or if you check my website, St. Michael Dot PW. There will be a special Good Friday Tenebrae service that I will be posting online. If you are interested in recording or sharing anything special for any upcoming services, please let me know. In person services are suspended until further notice.

For Reflection: Psalm 31:9-16

*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.
For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.*

*I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
For I hear the whispering of many—
terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.*

*But I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, "You are my God."
My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love. (NRSV*)*

The 31st Psalm gives us a picture of seeking God in distress. What hope do you find in this reflective reading? Do you seek God when things get difficult? How do you focus on God's grace and love when things in life get difficult? What does it mean to you to trust God?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being with us in these unusual times. We pray that you will pour out a spirit of calm for us all. Help us, that as we put distance between each other physically, that we do not create distance in our hearts. Let us not forget that we still share a common bond in your love and grace. May we find new ways to share your peace and your love with each other. Help us to do all we can to help each other as we do all we can to stay safe. Help us to remember that we are your people and you are our God. That whatever darkness comes, you are the light that shines upon our face. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Sermon:

Oh Lord, help us to be ready for you, ready to remember your mercy, ready to remember your love. Guide us by your Holy Spirit and grant us wisdom and understanding. That as the scriptures are read, and your Word proclaimed, may we be ready to listen, during this season of Lent. And let God's people say: Amen.

Our readings today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible*. Our first reading is from the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 21, verses 1 through 11.

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, saying,

*"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." (NRSV)*

Our second reading for today is from the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 27, verses 11 through 54.

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in

him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This is one of those confusing days where we get our celebrations and our sorrows all mingled together into one big mess. We celebrate the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and we have the suffering on the cross. It is a reminder that life is messy. That life is complicated. A reminder that we should be ready for now. But what does that look like? It depends.

It is easy to get it into our heads that everything looks one way, and if it doesn't look like that then it isn't right. But the truth of the matter is that being ready for now means being ready for things to change. It means being ready to adapt. It means finding new ways to make things happen. It means having to learn how to react to an ever-changing world with ever changing challenges. Figuring out how to celebrate the good as it comes while also understanding how to cope with the bad.

The first scripture for today is one of celebration. The anointed one is entering Jerusalem! The messiah is coming to make things right! Things are getting better! Things are looking up for the many people who are spreading cloaks and branches in the streets. There's shouting and rejoicing. Finally! The day has arrived when someone will put an end to suffering. We then shift to our second reading. One that is bitter. One that is painful. It is a sharp contrast to the jubilant feelings earlier. Just days earlier there was celebration. Now there is death. The chosen has been handed over to be beaten. To be humiliated. To be executed. We hear the cry "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and we cannot help but feel sorrow.

So how do we deal with a day full of mixed sorrow and joy? By being ready for now. Thing is that people were called to respond to what was happening around them. They were called to respond with joy or sadness, with acclamation or with despair. And they responded to what they knew. We, today, can read the scriptures about Christ's entrance and have a sorrow because we know what

comes next. We can see what is about to happen. We can read about the crucifixion and have a sense of awe and gladness because we know what comes next. And this can make it difficult to process these things. Because our context is very different than the context of experiencing them firsthand. It is easy to look back and have a very different feeling about events once they are history instead of now. And I think that teaches us something about both being ready for now and in having grace for our past selves. It is easy to see our mistakes and beat ourselves up. It is easy to declare that the disciples had little faith because they didn't understand all that was happening around them. It is easy to declare that the people celebrating should have been more concerned about what was going to happen. But it is different to live in the now of things. Now can be scary. It can be confusing. We don't always make the best of choices in the now. We let emotions cloud our reason and we let reason suppress our emotions. We try to dismiss concerns as just being overly worried and we worry that we've missed something important. And we constantly try to figure out how we would have done things differently to get a different outcome. The thing is, being ready for what is happening today often means being ready to adapt. I doubt anyone had set out in the morning saying "know what? I should bring some branches with me because maybe I'll need to cover the road for the son of David." I doubt anyone had told themselves "well, Jesus will probably be dead tomorrow so I should be prepared for how I'm going to deal with that." We cannot simply set out for the day prepared to deal with the exact things that may happen. So we adapt to be ready in spirit for whatever comes. We know that we will need to eat so we buy food. We know that we will need to sleep so we prepare a place to do that. I may not know exactly what I'll be hungry for, so I may have a few things on hand so that one of them will be what it was I wanted. I may not know exactly when I'm going to sleep, so I'll have a spot prepared so that it is ready. We can prepare our hearts and minds the same way. I may not know what good is about to show up, but I can pray for a heart ready to celebrate and give praise. I may not know what distress is about to come, but I can pray for a mind ready to process and handle it. I may not know what "now" will bring, but I can bring myself closer to God so that I am ready to handle whatever may come. That we may handle whatever may come together, by being prepared together in the spirit.

We can be ready for temptation by knowing what our weaknesses are and knowing what our strengths are. We can be ready for faith by knowing what we have faith in and knowing who strengthens our faith. We can be ready for unity by welcoming others and trusting that God can always bring us together. We can be ready for sight by trying to see others how God sees them and see ourselves how God sees us. We can be ready for the spirit by recognizing that things can be difficult and allowing the spirit to guide us and lead us. We can be ready for now by combining all those things into a trust. Trusting in Christ that all that we need will be given to us when we need it. Trusting in our Savior, who suffered that we would know we are cherished. One who died that we may know we are loved. One who showed us what it really means to love God and to love one another. One who showed us why those things are so important. We get ready for now by allowing Christ into our hearts and accepting the grace that our God has so freely offered to us. We get ready by singing loud hosannas and praising the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We get ready by lamenting the losses that we suffer in this mortal life. We get ready for now by looking back at all the ways God

has blessed us. We get ready for now by looking ahead to all that God has promised us. All of these things combine into knowing that God is with us. Good times and bad. Heartache and rejoicing. Sadness and celebration. God is there. Christ's promise wasn't that he'd be with us until his death but that he would be with us always. The promise wasn't that we would have God with us sometimes, but that we would have God with us always.

My last thought for you today is one about being in the middle of trying times. We are in times that push us to new levels of understanding and appreciation for "normal life." We very well may struggle with depression. With anxiety. With fear. With sadness. With loneliness. With loss. We may struggle to adapt. We may struggle to stay connected. We may want to give up. So I encourage you this week to remember all that we have gone over these last few weeks. I want you to take in everything that is difficult, and I want you to lift it up to the cross. That this week we remember triumph and tragedy and we remember sacrifice. Offer up whatever gives you troubles and lay them on the cross. Praise God for whatever joy and success we find. Keep your eyes on the cross. We may look up one moment and see pain and distress. But we know that God can turn that around. Do not lose hope and do not lose faith. Know that even in these trying times, God is there. Remember Christ on the cross, ready to suffer and die so that you may live. Remember that God is a God of surprise and wonder. That God is a God of grace and forgiveness. That God is a God of salvation. We may sit in the dark for a time, but there will always be light. Let us continue to strengthen each other in God's grace. Let us continue to look to the cross for comfort, healing, and hope. Let us remember that it was a season of pain that brought us an everlasting joy. Let us continue to lift each other in prayer and help each other in this time of trial. Let us remember that God is with us, always and everywhere. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Lord, forgive us we pray. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we say and do. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we do not say and what we do not do. It is in our doings and our failings that we seek your grace and your mercy. We haven't loved you how we should. We haven't loved each other how we should. We are a people who are sorry, who humbly seek your forgiveness. Help us to live with one another in your mercy and your grace. Let us always remember the sacrifice made by our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may understand your deep love for us. May we honor that love by sharing it with one another, loving as you love and caring as you care. Help us to be of one body redeemed by one blood, serving one God. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed in the weekly update. If you are interested in online giving, please contact me. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Music: Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed

1. Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For sinners such as I?

2. Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

3. Well might the sun in darkness hide
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker died,
For man the creature's sin.

4. But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away
'Tis all that I can do.

Dismissal with Blessing: May I leave you today with the blessing of the Father, the peace of the Son, and the unity of the Holy Spirit. May God be with you, until we meet again. **Amen.**

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
John & Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Bill Calvert	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers
Dave Yaw	Aaron Carrell	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Joyce Sly	Nancy Hoke	John Millsap	Larry Sidwell
Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ty Bradley	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Jerry Jackson	Pat Nebel	Don Stewart	Earlene Shupe
Brenda Hurt	Sharron Button		
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne & Charlotte Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lyle Whitley	Tammy Fischer and Children	

Offerings may be mailed to your local treasurer or addressed to:

Rev Camron D St. Michael

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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4/5/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update! Let's go ahead and begin with when we will see each other again.

I have no clue to be honest. The governor has extended the stay-at-home order until the end of April. Unless that changes, then we will see each other in May. I hope you've been enjoying the online service videos and the printed materials! This will be the primary way I will be putting services together until May. I will be getting in touch about an "Easter" service in May. We will still be celebrating Easter on Easter, but I want to see about having a special service when we do finally get back together.

I do have a special request! Send me pictures and video of yourselves with an Easter greeting and I'll include you in the Sunday service! I need all videos and pictures before Friday if possible. If there's anyone that you could get a photo or video of safely while practicing good social distancing, I would be happy to have them of those who can't send in their own!

Please let me know of any updates or anyone that is in need of special consideration. I have been having to adapt my schedule to make room for the extra effort involved in making the online worship experience possible and with adapting my schedule to include leading lessons for the kids.

As we continue in the current stay at home order, we are also facing economic problems. Legislation has been passed that will offer economic relief for some. However, we must be prepared as a church to support each other and support those in need. This may have a longer lasting impact than the virus and I urge everyone to be in prayer. Also, be in contact with each other. Please check in on people and let us remain a close-knit community, even when we are practicing safe social distancing.

We do have guidance for a live communion service, but it would need to be done in a live video feed. If anyone is interested in helping put this together, please let me know.

I will be continuing to have our worship services online and in print! It is on YouTube and a link can be found on my website as listed below. I am also posting the information on the church Facebook page. If there is anything you would like to contribute, let me know! There will also be printed materials available at the churches to pick up. Please feel free to contact me for more information. If anyone is interested in doing music for any upcoming service, please let me know. There are many options for doing this. I can also share readings or any other video that you'd like to make part of the service. Participation is welcome! I am working hard on having a simple Tenebrae service for Good Friday that I will make available online on Good Friday. The printed copy is available now.

Also, in this time we are still working to keep the bills paid, our missions supported, our apportionments met, and our outreach working. As such, we do need your continued financial support as part of the church. Offerings may be sent to your local treasurer or to the PO Box listed below. I can also arrange to pick them up if I am delivering anything to you. I am personally grateful for all your continued support in this difficult time. I cannot stress enough that the church is still active and we are still together.

If anyone is interested in online groups or interested in how to form one, I am available to help. There are free tools available to be able to still meet online for Sunday School or other meetings.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus. Make sure to wash your hands, as it is the best way to keep from spreading the virus. If you are not feeling well, running a temperature, or otherwise seem to be taking ill, stay at home and let someone know. That way someone can check in if you get worse and you won't risk spreading anything to others. If you are needing someone to pick up things at the store and don't feel you should be out, contact a friend or myself. I will be doing shopping for people as needed for those who do not want to be out. I personally am volunteering as a younger adult who is not at high risk in order to help anyone who needs it. Please feel free to call me and I can make arrangements to help with anything you might need delivered. Please let others know, and together we will all see this through safely.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL 61920