

**ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR PALM/PASSION SUNDAY**  
**APRIL 5, 2020**

**BEFORE WE WORSHIP, WE REFLECT...**

*Today, we encounter the paradox that defines our faith: Jesus Christ is glorified king and humiliated servant. We too are full of paradox: like Peter, we fervently desire to follow Christ, but find ourselves afraid, denying God. We wave palms in celebration today as Christ comes into our midst, and we follow with trepidation as his path leads to death on the cross. Amid it all we are invited into this paradoxical promise of life through Christ's broken body and outpoured love in a meal of bread and wine. We begin this week that stands at the center of the church year, anticipating the completion of God's astounding work.*

*We began the journey of Lent with the story of a garden, a tree, and broken relationships. Now on the last Sunday of Lent we arrive at a different garden – the garden of Gethsemane; and a symbolic tree – the cross, the tree of Calvary. Today Jesus himself is the story: Jesus the faithful servant, God's anointed one – the Messiah, the Christ – God with us. The one who was rejected and crucified. Yet even this did not cause God to abandon us. Instead God took this terrible act of hatred and jealousy and transformed it into a gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the cornerstone experience of our faith. No matter what happens or what we do, we can come openly and honestly to God, trusting in God's grace and forgiveness as manifest in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

**PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL:** Matthew 21:1-11

<sup>1</sup>When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

<sup>5</sup>"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."

<sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; <sup>7</sup>they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>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!"

<sup>10</sup>When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup>The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

**BLESSING OF PALMS**

We praise you, O God, for redeeming the world through our Savior Jesus Christ. Today he entered the holy city in triumph and was proclaimed messiah and king by those who spread garments and branches along his way. Bless these branches and those who carry them. Grant us grace to follow our Lord in the way of the cross, so that, joined to his death and resurrection, we enter into life with you; through the same Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Let us go forth in peace, in the name of Christ. Amen.

### ***CENTERING PRAYER:***

Jesus, we come this day filled with excitement and enthusiasm, like all those who gathered at the side of the road to cheer and wave palms that day in Jerusalem so long ago. Our lives are full of “busyness” and rushing from here to there, with little time to think about who you really are and what you have done, just like all those who waved the palms and in so short a time, shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Help us to be aware of the parts of ourselves that need to die: our greed, our laziness, our jealousy, our misplaced anger, our unwillingness to forgive. Help us to find the new life that is possible for each of us, just as it was possible for you. Amen.

### **OUR GIFTS FOR MISSION & SERVICE SUPPORT PROJECTS THAT FOSTER RECONCILIATION.**

Twenty-eight years ago, when it was founded, Faith United Church in Kingston, Ontario, bought land near Highway 15 with the vision of creating a church building. Meeting in a local high school, they eventually decided to put their energy into being a caring community rather than into a building. Then, during the last year, Faith United began a time of discernment around the land. The members of the congregation felt inspired to walk a path of peace and offer the land as a place of healing.

The church and the Indigenous peoples of Kingston are currently in conversation as they collaborate on how to create a space where all can find healing. Talking over tea and shared meals, they are exchanging ideas on how to come together in friendship. Currently they are considering creating a garden for reflection and reconciliation that contains Indigenous sacred medicine plants.

Thanks to a grant from the Justice and Reconciliation Fund, supported by your gifts for Mission & Service, the Indigenous peoples of Kingston and Faith United Church members are able to move forward.

“We open our eyes now,” the Elders and congregation members shared in a report on the initiative. “We aren’t blinded by hopefulness and naïveté: we know our vision for this piece of land is grand in size and workload. We also know that when we walk together in a good way, when we root the process in ceremony and healing, we are acknowledging we aren’t walking this path alone. Together we can. Together we will. One step along the path of peace.”

May it be so!

If Mission & Service giving is already a regular part of your life, thank you so much! If you have not given, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith. Loving our neighbour is at the heart of our Mission & Service.

### ***PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:***

Gracious and Holy God, give us wisdom to recognize you; intelligence to understand you; diligence to seek you; patience to wait for you; eyes to see you; a heart to meditate on you and a life to proclaim you, through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### ***FIRST READING:*** Isaiah 50:4-9a

<sup>4</sup>The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

<sup>5</sup>The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward.

<sup>6</sup>I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

<sup>7</sup>The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

<sup>8</sup>he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.

<sup>9a</sup>It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

### **Psalm 31:9-16**

<sup>9</sup>Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I | am in trouble; my eye is consumed with sorrow, and also my throat | and my belly.

<sup>10</sup>**For my life is wasted with grief, and my | years with sighing; my strength fails me because of affliction, and my bones | are consumed.**

<sup>11</sup>I am the scorn of all my enemies, a disgrace to my neighbors, a dismay to | my acquaintances; when they see me in the street | they avoid me.

<sup>12</sup>**Like the dead I am forgotten, | out of mind; I am as useless as a | broken pot. R**

<sup>13</sup>For I have heard the whispering of the crowd; fear is | all around; they put their heads together against me; they plot to | take my life.

<sup>14</sup>**But as for me, I have trusted in | you, O LORD. I have said, "You | are my God.**

<sup>15</sup>My times are | in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who | persecute me.

<sup>16</sup>**Let your face shine up- | on your servant; save me in your | steadfast love." R**

### **SECOND READING:** Philippians 2:5-11

<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup>he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

### **GOSPEL:** Matthew 27:11-54

<sup>11</sup>Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." <sup>12</sup>But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. <sup>13</sup>Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" <sup>14</sup>But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

<sup>15</sup>Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. <sup>16</sup>At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. <sup>17</sup>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?" <sup>18</sup>For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. <sup>19</sup>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." <sup>20</sup>Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the

crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. <sup>21</sup>The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." <sup>22</sup>Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" <sup>23</sup>Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

<sup>24</sup>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." <sup>25</sup>Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" <sup>26</sup>So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

<sup>27</sup>Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. <sup>28</sup>They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup>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!" <sup>30</sup>They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. <sup>31</sup>After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

<sup>32</sup>As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. <sup>33</sup>And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), <sup>34</sup>they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. <sup>35</sup>And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; <sup>36</sup>then they sat down there and kept watch over him. <sup>37</sup>Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

<sup>38</sup>Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>39</sup>Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup>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." <sup>41</sup>In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, <sup>42</sup>"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. <sup>43</sup>He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" <sup>44</sup>The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

<sup>45</sup>From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>46</sup>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?" <sup>47</sup>When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." <sup>48</sup>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. <sup>49</sup>But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." <sup>50</sup>Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. <sup>51</sup>At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup>The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. <sup>53</sup>After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup>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!"

## **SERMON:**

There was a company in Calgary, when I lived there during university, called, Scheme a Dream. If you were throwing a party, or just wanted to embarrass someone at their work place, this company had the means to do just about anything!

One day, as I was walking downtown, this woman came up to me and said, "How would you like to make a buck? I'll give you a dollar if you come and sing Happy Birthday to someone." Since I had nothing better to do, I took the dollar and said I would sing. Among those of us who had taken the bribe was a guy with a very big, friendly, drooling dog. There was also someone in a gorilla outfit.

When the woman figured she had enough people we headed up to an office, found some poor, unsuspecting young man sitting at his desk, and surrounded him. He wasn't sure what to make of this situation - especially with the gorilla standing right in front of him - until we sang happy birthday. Then we all learned that this fellow's girlfriend had arranged the whole thing! He had a good laugh and then, looking at all of us, and the drooling dog, said, "Who are you?!"

"Who is this?" the crowds asked. This was not a common sight, to see someone riding into the city on a donkey, with people shouting "hosanna!" and waving branches. Some were not sure what to do. Should they join in, or keep walking, but in the other direction?

"This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." Oh, that's nice. Yet this information would not get them any further in their understanding than if we had told that young man, whose birthday it was, who we were. For unless there was some inkling of a previous encounter, he may know our names, but he still would not have known who we were. Similarly, with Jesus. Unless people had heard of his miracles, his reputation for putting the scribes and pharisees in their place, unless they knew of Lazarus or had heard of the feeding of the thousands, this fellow coming into town riding on a donkey, the traditional animal of peace, would be no more impressive than if you or I were riding the donkey.

And yet, we get caught up in the excitement of the moment. It may be that there is a bit of a bribe, an enticement for joining the crowd; it could be curiosity, or it could be that we have certain expectations that we want lived out, and so in hope that these expectations will be met, we follow. While we claim to be Christian, while we claim to be disciples, while we claim to know who Jesus really is, we are often no better than those who asked, "Who is this?" for we struggle in our faith, and sometimes we are unsure just who Jesus is in our lives. We are no better than the crowds who shouted, "Hosanna!", meaning, "Save us now!", and then within days were shouting, "Crucify him!" Oh yes, we pray, we ask, we seek, we hope that our expectations will be met, but when we forget that God can also answer us with "no", or when we forget that God's expectations and our expectations often do not match, we may become angry, hurt, frightened and curse God out of our pain and confusion. We are no better than the disciples who, knowing who Jesus was, deserted him as he was taken as prisoner in the garden, and only in hindsight, after the horror of the crucifixion was over, and Christ resurrected, saw in this moment the fulfillment of scripture and the plan of God.

Who is this, riding into the city on a donkey? It is the son of God, **who is** the source of love, **who is** forgiveness, **who is** acceptance, **who is** stronger than death, **who is** the giver of new life. It is Jesus, who, although condemned and crucified, deserted and who felt abandoned by God, is also the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel--God with us, the resurrected one, the Spirit giver, the one who loves and accepts us in spite of ourselves.

I have often wondered what thoughts went through Jesus' mind as he rode through Jerusalem, receiving praise, yet also knowing this was the road to death. Looking out at the many faces, looking into their eyes and knowing their lives, their fears, their hopes. Knowing that in order to have hope that they would first be disappointed. In order to have new life they would have to die in their human expectations and rise to the fullness of life in the risen Christ. To be a bearer of peace can be overwhelming. It can mean death.

"Who is this?" It is fitting, as we face Holy Week and the Cross, to ask this question about Jesus for ourselves. Ask ourselves what our expectations are, and then ask, in faith and humility, that God's will, not ours, be done. Amen.

### ***PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION:***

Surprising God, you come to our lives in ways we do not expect.

We ask for success;  
you teach us acceptance.

We ask to be loved;  
you ask us to love.

We ask for ease;  
you challenge us.

We ask for ourselves;  
you remind us of the needs of others.

We ask for a triumphant Messiah;  
you come as one obedient to death.

We glorify the winner;  
you glorify the loser who died on the criminal's cross.

Walk among us, Surprising God. And be especially with those in our world who are crucified because we do not see, nor act according to your love.

Compassionate God, as this world struggles to cope with this pandemic, help us to stay apart physically, yet connected emotionally. May we not forget to use our technology to stay in touch with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We continue to pray, and ask your protection for, all those essential medical staff and service workers who continue to serve the public, putting themselves and their loved ones at risk. We thank you for their dedication. We pray also for our family members, friends and community members who are struggling in body, mind and spirit - some with long-term, potentially fatal, illnesses. We uphold to you the family of Annie Grossman; Rita Covernton; Mike Froese; Brooke Alexiuk; Abbie; Tracy Skoglund; Carolyn & Douglas; Don; Amber; Nicole; Gordon Dreger; Scott Brown; Diane Dreger; Elizabeth & David; Sandy and Ron. You have made a covenant with us. Let us live in covenant with you. Amen.

### ***THE LORD'S PRAYER***

#### ***BENEDICTION:***

The holy mystery we call God is a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge for times of trouble. Go, embraced by the Source of life, love and hope; following in the way of Jesus, just and compassionate; encouraged by the Spirit of grace and wisdom. Amen.