



**April 5, 2020  
Palm Sunday**

*A family of faith ministering together  
in the name of Jesus Christ*

**Ministers: Each of us Assisted by Rev. Mark Perry**

**Organist: Kathy Limon**

**Introit to Prayer VU 948** “O God, Hear My Prayer”

O God, hear my prayer, O God hear my prayer; when I call answer me.

O God, hear my prayer, O God hear my prayer; come and listen to me.

**Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

**& The Lord's Prayer** (*spoken*)

We say, O God, that everyone loves a parade, but what does the parade celebrate? Victory? Homecoming? Thanksgiving? Achievement? Or the arrival of your beloved child, come to show us your way in the world – our way in the world?

Our prayers today are for a world in which so much seems right – beauty, the warmth of the sun, the love of family and friends, the sound of happy children, a world of wonder and possibility, and so much more.

Our prayers today are for a world in which so much seems wrong – violence, poverty in the midst of plenty, hatred, pain and suffering, disease and sorrow, loneliness and heartache, and so much more.

We pray for political leaders faced with unforeseen challenges, and who face difficult decisions in this time of uncertainty, and catastrophe.

We pray for families who are struggling with suddenly working from home, and at the same time have children who do not understand why they can't go out, and who have boundless energy at home all day with them.

We pray for those who have lost their jobs and their financial security and who wonder how they are going to pay their bills, their rent, their mortgage, and buy groceries to feed themselves and their families.

Today we pray for those who hope that their dreams of a better world may be fulfilled. And we pray for those who are fearful and anxious, that their anxiety may be eased.

We praise you, O God, for your redemption of the world through Jesus Christ. Today he entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph and was proclaimed Messiah and king by those who spread garments and branches along his way. Yet, within days, the triumph turned to tragedy, the hosannas turned to calls for his crucifixion, the elation turned to agony. You, O Lord, know suffering.

You, who wept at Lazarus' death know the pain of mourning, like the friends and family of the thousands who have died during this pandemic.....

You, who healed many, know the suffering of those like Ron Dickie, Marlene Smith, Nancy Torrance, and all those who are hospitalized with covid-19.....who are ill, and the suffering of their friends and families and caregivers.

You, who came to be saviour of the world, know the struggles of people everywhere, like the people of Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania for whom we pray this week.

You, who spent forty days and forty nights in the desert know all about walking difficult paths. Lord, in your faithfulness, be with all for whom we pray, and see us all into your kingdom, where, with God our Father, and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, you live and reign, now and forever. We gather our prayers and offer them with the prayer you taught us.... 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 sins, as we forgive those who sin 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.

### **Our Offering in Support of God's Mission**

We hear of a king riding on a donkey, a king who is to be crucified. This is a story of a world in which injustice seems to reign. We live in a world of uncertainty, of isolation and death and suffering. Our God knows about suffering and invites us to reverse and counter injustice and suffering wherever we can. As a church we proclaim that we seek justice and resist evil, we proclaim Jesus crucified and risen. As a church we offer hope and support to those in need. The world needs the church now more than it has for generations. You can support the work of the church by sending a cheque to our Treasurer, Berniece, or by PAR...when is the last time you adjusted your giving (either up or down, depending on your situation)... or by clicking on the Donate Now button on our website – [unionunitedchurch.ca](http://unionunitedchurch.ca)

May our offerings this morning be like the donkey that Jesus rode into Jerusalem; may they support God's ministry, and may they carry that ministry into all the places in our community and around the world where it needs to go. Amen.

**Scripture:** Matthew 21:1-11 (NRSV)

### **Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem**

**21** 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>[a]</sup>" <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<sup>[b]</sup> 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."

**Meditation:** “One or the Other”

My stepfather, when he married my mother, had a small pleasure boat, thirty two feet, I think it was. It had a teak hull, a galley, bunkbeds, a head, a screened in deck, and a mahogany swim platform off the stern. They spent their honeymoon on it, travelling the waters of the Trent-Severn system. At one of the locks they stopped to go into town and replenish their supplies. The fridge in the galley was small and it didn't hold much in the way of perishables. They often ran out of milk or eggs or something. Anyway, after they had picked up their supplies, they headed back to the boat. My stepfather cast off the line, and waited for mom to come aboard. She had one foot on shore, and the other on the boat, committed fully to neither. I think you can all imagine what happened. Since the line had been cast off, the boat moved away from the shore and mom, unable to either stay ashore, or jump aboard, fell straight down into the water. It is this picture that I hold in my mind when I read Matthew's version of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

I can just picture him riding into town astride those two animals. One foot on each the donkey and her colt. The crowd going wild, strowing their coats on the roadway, shouting loudly, waving their fronds like victor's swords. All of the noise and excitement and visual distractions, not to mention the fact that it was the first time the colt had ever carried a rider, would be enough to make it skittish. Any little noise or touch might startle it into bolting, and there would be Jesus, flat on his face on the roadway, the colt halfway to who knows where, and the donkey looking placidly at him with an expression that says, “Foolish man, to think you could ride two animals at once. You should have known better.”

But isn't that just exactly what we try to do? Straddle two worlds. One foot in this world, and the other in the kingdom of heaven. Called to righteousness, and yet succumbing to temptation and sin. Called into light, and yet allowing darkness to overwhelm us. Called to love our neighbours, and yet allowing prejudice and hatred to divide us. Called to peace, and yet having to be in control of every situation. Called to freedom, and yet living in tombs. Called to faith, and yet unwilling to trust in God alone. And at the root of all of these lies fear.

It's so easy to say, in church on Sunday morning, yes Lord, I will feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the prisoners, care for the sick, shelter the homeless, and love the unloved and unlovable. Yet when we leave church, something happens. We get so busy in our own lives, so concerned about our own well-being that we forget about the prisoners and the sick and the homeless. We rush past the homeless and the hungry. We turn a blind eye to the naked, the unloved and the unlovable. I know that, especially this past week, I feel that I have cut myself off from others in order to prepare worship for Holy Week, despite my call to serve and work amidst you.

Some time ago, CBC radio's Quirks and Quarks had a show about the mating habits of some small, South American monkeys that are the size of a squirrel and live in social groups of between five and fifteen. It appears that only the dominant female mates, and all the other females in the group help raise the offspring. But it is even more interesting than that. When a female enters the group, as soon as she becomes submissive, something in her brain changes the hormonal outputs and she ceases to ovulate, she becomes infertile. In response to social input, her body and her life change. The scientists who are studying these monkeys say the same is true of us, although to a lesser degree. We change our behaviour according to social inputs. Like, when we are in church, we say we love God and will do what God is calling us to, because everyone else is doing the same. But when we leave here, and we enter another social world, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to maintain that commitment. The social inputs have changed, and in order to survive, we change our behaviour and our language. In other words, we get caught between two worlds, just like Jesus got caught between two crowds.

The first crowd is the crowd who cheered him on his way into Jerusalem. They greeted him as they would have greeted any king who had just defeated an enemy; who came riding into town on his stallion, his

troops waving their swords in victory and his admirers throwing their coats down before him. And then a few days later, on Friday, the crowd called for the release of Barabas and the crucifixion of Jesus. And even knowing this, Jesus did not hold back.

There are two other worlds we are caught between right now. The pre-covid-19 world, and the post-covid-19 world. We are smack dab in the middle, in what academics would call a liminal time. We are no longer firmly rooted in the pre-covid-19 world, especially because we are now sheltering in place, except to get essential tasks like grocery shopping done, and then we are practicing physical distancing. Many people, like my daughter have been laid off. They are disconnected from their social networks at work, and financially stranded, at least until government aid starts flowing.

On the other hand, there is the post-covid-19 world. A world of uncertainty for many. What businesses will reopen and which will never reopen? Who among our families, coworkers, and social networks will be alive, and who will be dead? Who will have a job to return to, and who will not? Who will be financially destitute because of the collapse of the stock markets, and who is poised to reap large gains as the markets rebound? Will handshaking become a thing of the past (The handshake started in the days of the sword and dagger. In order to extend your right hand as a gesture of peace and goodwill, you first had to put down your sword. This is why left-handed people were considered evil, they could extend their right hand and still stab you in the back with a dagger in their dominant left hand.), or will we now bump elbows or tap feet together? What other social interactions will change? We cannot be sure of anything, yet. Just that there will be a post-covid-19 world, sometime. The story about the monkeys is a hopeful reminder that as the social inputs change, as our social reality changes, we are capable of adapting to the new reality.

When my stepfather saw that my mother was caught between the shore and the boat, he jumped up on the foredeck with a pike pole and reached out to his beloved. He hoped she would be able to grab hold of it and he could pull her to safety on the boat, but he was too late. Like my mother, we are precariously balanced, one foot in this world, the other in the kingdom. But Jesus is not precariously balanced on two animals, as we may suppose. Jesus is firmly planted on only one animal. Jesus is firmly seated in the kingdom and, like my stepfather, is reaching out to us with a pike pole to pull us safely aboard. Even now, he is reaching out to us, for our sakes, because we are his beloved. Thanks be to God.

#### **Announcements.....**

Next Sunday, March 12, is Easter Sunday. The 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee originally planned to make Easter Sunday a day to wear your Easter Bonnet. There is no reason why we can't still do that, so everyone get creative and wear an Easter Bonnet for next Sunday. Also, we had scheduled communion for Easter Sunday. There is no reason why we can't go ahead with that too. Rev. Mark will be dropping off, on your doorstep or in your mailbox, instant communion. There is a sealed cup of grape juice, and a wafer too (between two flaps on the lid). Let's celebrate together!

Those wishing to send your offering to Berniece, here is her address

Union United Church  
c/o Berniece Lidster  
46810 Martyn Line  
Sparta, ON N0L 2H0

If you prefer to donate your offering electronically, there is a "donate now" button on our website at:  
[www.unionunitedchurch.ca](http://www.unionunitedchurch.ca)

Just complete the form and submit. You may choose "now" or "monthly".