

# Sunnybrook United Church

## Our Vision:

### Being - Belonging - Becoming

Living our lives with compassion, commitment, purpose, and meaning. Creating a warm and welcoming intergenerational community of faith, while challenging one another to learn and grow

## Our Mission:

We are a community seeking to follow Jesus the Christ. We gather in large and small groups to worship, celebrate, encourage and comfort one another. Living our faith, we walk humbly with God, caring for all with love and compassion, and pursuing justice.



*Figure 1 - photo used with permission from Pixabay*

## **An Order for Physically Distant Worship** **April 5, 2020 – Palm Sunday**

**NOTE:** The content in this printed resource will be part of the Worship that will be livestreamed and recorded on Facebook and other platforms on Sunday, April 5.

**PREPARING FOR WORSHIP:** Begin by settling yourself in a comfortable place, taking some deep breaths and imagining the other people from our congregation and elsewhere who are also opening themselves to worship today.

### **THE STORY OF PALM SUNDAY (from Matthew 21)**

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup> “Say to Daughter Zion,  
‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**OPENING PRAYER:** Gracious God, we are like the people of Jerusalem, we are hungry for a hero. As we wait for Jesus to come, let us not be disappointed when he appears (even though we are certain to be surprised); and give us courage to follow where the One on the donkey might lead. Amen

♪ **OPENING SONG:** sing (if you know the tune) or read slowly and reflectively the words to this hymn by John L. Bell (*Voices United* # 126, verse 1-2):

Ride on, ride on, the time is right:  
the roadside crowds scream with delight,  
palm branches mark the pilgrim way  
where beggars squat and children play.

Ride on, ride on, your critics wait,  
intrigue and rumour circulate,  
new lies abound in word and jest  
and truth becomes a suspect guest.

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### **SCRIPTURE READING: PHILIPPIANS 2 :5-11**

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.

**MINISTER’S MESSAGE:** (by Rev. Ross Smillie)

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was welcomed by those who were longing for a Saviour. The cry “Hosanna” means, literally translated, “Save us!” But they were not looking for someone who would get them into heaven after death. That was a much later understanding and very impoverished understanding of salvation. Rather, they were looking for a leader who would ease their earthly suffering of poverty, oppression and occupation.

I find myself resonating with that hope even more than usual this year, as I long for salvation from a virus, from a collapsing economy, from the restrictions that prevent me from seeing you, my friends, and others I care about. I long for things to go back to the way they were.

But if there is one thing that we should learn from Palm Sunday, it is that God often does not give us what we think we want. The kind of political and economic liberation that people longed on the first Palm Sunday was not forthcoming. Instead, the one sent by God was sent to empty himself, to humble himself to the point of death, as the reading from Philippians teaches.

Today, we long for things to go back to normal, but I think we are going to be disappointed in that as well. Things will be different after this pandemic. We don’t know exactly how things will look in a year or two. We know some things. We know that there will be people who will not survive this pandemic. Our world will be different without them. We know that it will take the economy some time to recover, but we don’t know how long this will last and or what the economy will look like when this is over. It will take time to recover, and we will recover, but after we recover things will be different. Everything will not go back to the way they were. Something like this changes a person. Something like this changes a community, changes a country, changes the world. And we don’t know what all of that will look like. Things will not go back to normal. We will find a new normal, but we don’t know what that will be like.

For the time being, I think it is important to simply allow ourselves to feel the sadness of that, to grieve what we have lost and what we are losing. Some of us

have lost our freedom and our ability to move around freely. Some of us have lost our ability to connect with those we love. Some of us have lost jobs, and savings and security. My retirement is being postponed. Weddings I was looking forward to are being postponed. Our summer trip is almost certainly cancelled.

My colleague in High River, Rev. David Robertson, has been through a lot, first with the trauma of the High River flood and now because so many of the things he was looking forward to have been cancelled. His advice: “find your tears... Gently come alongside your sadness and take up a relationship with it.” Denying and repressing our grief is not healthy. Being honest about our emotions is healthy, and in times of loss, David says. “Tears are nature’s way of delivering us to healing, recovery and resilience—resilience as defined by our capacity to bounce back... Our tears will deliver us to the other side of sadness.”

Now maybe, like me, tears are not your go-to way of dealing with sadness, but we all need to grieve, and to allow ourselves to face the magnitude of the losses we are experiencing.

This week, I came across an article by the biblical scholar N.T. Wright, who points out that the Psalms offer good examples of how to grieve. The Psalms contain many examples of lament. “Lament is what happens when people ask, ‘Why?’ and don’t get an answer.” Here are some examples of lament psalms that resonate with us at this time:

“Be gracious to me, Lord,” prays the sixth Psalm, “for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.” “Why do you stand far off, O Lord?” asks the 10th Psalm plaintively. “Why do you hide yourself in time of trouble?” And so it goes on: “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?” (Psalm 13). And, all the more terrifying because Jesus himself quoted it in his agony on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22). [N.T. Wright, “Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It’s Not Supposed To” *Time Magazine*, March 29, 2020]

The lament psalms invite us to express our grief, to take it seriously, to come alongside it and take up a relationship with it,” (in the words of David Robertson). Lament provides (in the words of Professor Wright) “an outlet for our frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening or why.”

But more important, the laments invite us to claim God as a companion in that grief. Because the biblical witness is not to the unmoved mover of Greek philosophy, but to the passionate God who weeps over the creation like a mother weeps over the wayward child. As one of our favorite hymns at Sunnybrook

proclaims, “God Weeps at love withheld, at strength misused, at children’s innocence abused, and till we change the way we love, God weeps.” (*More Voices* # 78 – shared with permission under OneLicense # A-715266)

To quote Professor Wright again:

God was grieved to his heart, Genesis declares, over the violent wickedness of his human creatures. [God] was devastated [according to the prophet Hosea] when his own bride, the people of Israel, turned away from him. And when God came back to his people in [Jesus], he wept at the tomb of his friend. St. Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit “groaning” within us, as we ourselves groan within the pain of the whole creation. The ancient doctrine of the Trinity teaches us to recognize the One God in the tears of Jesus and the anguish of the Spirit. [Wright, “Christianity Offers No Answers”]

So this Palm Sunday, as we remind ourselves not to be too surprised when the salvation we long for is not the salvation we get, let us yet celebrate the good news that we are held in our sadness and grief in a loving embrace. That may not save us from the things we fear, but it saves us for something more important: the capacity to be fully human. Because it is only when we can embrace our sadness and our tears that we to discover that sorrow and kindness, as the poet Naomi Shihab Nye says so beautifully, are linked together as the deepest things in human life:

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness...

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.  
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,  
only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,

and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.

“Kindness” From *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*. Copyright © 1995 by Naomi Shihab Nye.

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**OFFERING** – think about the ways in which you are gifted (with time? with talent? with wisdom? with experience?), and about how you are called to share your gifts with those in your circle. Make that your offering today.

**CELEBRATIONS AND CONCERNS** – Take a moment to identify what and who you are grateful for, what and who you are concerned for, and hold them in your heart as you pray this next prayer:

**PRAYERS OF CELEBRATION AND CONCERN:**

God of all mercies, grant:

To the people of Earth, wisdom and health;

To those afflicted with COVID-19, swift healing;

To the frightened, courage;

To the dying, comfort;

To the dead, eternal life;

To health care providers, stamina and safety;

To our leaders, wisdom and compassion;

To our nation, unity of purpose;

To those who profess belief in God,  
the grace to serve the suffering safely;

To all believers, strong faith in Your presence;

To the whole human family, unity of heart;

To us, your servants, the reward of knowing that we are doing your will when we spend ourselves in loving service of others. Amen.

**REMINDERS:** - VIRTUAL AFTER-CHURCH COFFEE ON ZOOM RIGHT AFTER THIS SERVICE CONCLUDES

- GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE AT 10:30AM
- EASTER SUNDAY SERVICE AT 10:30AM

**A REMINDER:** from our United Church Creed, words that seem even more meaningful in this time of physical distancing:

We are not alone, we live in God’s world

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.  
We are not alone, thanks be to God. Amen.

**A BLESSING:**

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Love of God, and the fellowship in the Holy Spirit  
be with us all this day and evermore. Amen.