



## St. John the Evangelist Church

3428 Portage Road, Niagara Falls, Ontario

L2J 2K4

Phone: 905-354-1227

---

April 1, 2020

Dear Friends,

Well what we may have thought was going to be a sprint is quickly turning into a marathon. It seems it's going to be many more weeks before we are able to gather again for worship in our beloved building. Not an encouraging development but it is out of our hands.

We keep our Facebook page up to date with the latest news from the diocese and I encourage you to go to the webpage for the Diocese of Niagara and specifically the Covid-19 Resource hub;

[niagaraanglican.ca/news/covid-19-resource-hub](http://niagaraanglican.ca/news/covid-19-resource-hub)

You can find the latest information from the diocese and national church and the Sunday morning worship led by Bishop Susan. I have intentionally not done a video worship service so as not to compete with the Bishop.

Also in the Covid-19 Resource hub there are links to how you can continue to give to St. John's during this time. Of course you can always drop off your envelope in the mail box at the front office doors of the church, the mail is checked daily so this is a secure option. And online giving through the diocese page is also an option.

This may also be a great time to set up a pre-authorized withdrawal from your bank to St. John's – this form is also available on the diocese website.

Over the next few days we are going to telephone everyone on the parish list as a way to check in and see how you are doing. I know many of you are already doing this and it is heartening to see this happen. So that no one is overlooked we'll make our way down the parish list and attempt to speak to every household.

A reminder for those of you with keys the building is closed and apart from those assigned to daily checks we are NOT to be in the church building. As we've all been told by many sources, stay home, and stay safe.

As this Sunday is Palm Sunday and we have received our Palm branch order I will leave a bucket with individual palms at the front office doors, you're invited to take one and make your own palm cross. There is a page of directions included in this mailing.

I pray that this is a helpful resource for you and that we are all holding our own during these exceptional times. May God bless you and keep you safe!

*Rev'd. Mark+*

Loving God, whose peace passes all our understanding;  
as we face this present pandemic, and experience fear and anxiety,  
may we hear your voice, bringing calm to the storms of our time.

Strengthen those who work to limit the spread of infection,  
and those who seek to care for the sick,  
and keep us mindful of those most vulnerable.

May we shape our living to protect one another,  
and may our changing habits, practices and sacrifices,  
be for the greater love of our community and all your people.  
Amen.



## Readings for Palm Sunday

### Collect for Palm Sunday

God of our salvation,  
we give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
who came in your name  
and turned the lonely way of rejection and death  
into triumph.

Grant us the steadfast faith  
to enter the gates of righteousness,  
that we may receive grace to become worthy  
citizens of your holy realm.

Amen.

### Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his  
steadfast love endures forever!

Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures  
forever."

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may  
enter through them and give thanks to the  
LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall  
enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have  
become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become  
the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our  
eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us  
rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD,  
we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the  
LORD. We bless you from the house of the  
LORD.

The LORD is God, and he has given us light.  
Bind the festal procession with branches, up to  
the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;  
you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for  
his steadfast love endures forever.

### A Psalm of Celebration

*(loosely inspired by Psalm 118)*

Though we have known hardship and pain,  
though life has not always turned out as we had  
hoped, we will stand here and say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

Though life becomes more complex,  
the deepest questions remain unanswered,

and the mystery of faith deepens, we will say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

And though the pain of the world

often seems more than we can bear or address,  
we will stand firm in our faith and say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

*~ written by Ann Siddall,  
in Lent to Easter liturgies: Year C.  
<http://stillpoint.unitingchurchsa.org.au/>*

## Matthew Chapter 21 verses 1-11

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."



## A Sermon for Palm Sunday

At its heart, religion is mysticism. Abraham entertaining angels, Buddha under the Bo tree, Jesus up to his waist in the muddy waters of the Jordan: each of them responds to something for which our words are entirely inadequate. "I have seen things," Aquinas told a friend, "that make all my writings seem like straw." Religion as institution, ethics, dogma, liturgy, social action – all of this comes later and in the long run maybe counts for less. Faith begins, as Frost said poems do, with a lump in the throat, and that is to put it mildly.

Religion as a word points to that area of human life and experience where in one way or another we come upon a mystery and in it find a summons to pilgrimage. And our lives become a journey to a destination, that perhaps we've had a glimpse of, and yet that we can never fully know until we reach it.

You see we're all mystics, trouble is we just don't want to admit it to one another – life is complicated enough as it is, after all. We've seen more than we let on, even to ourselves. Through some moment of beauty or pain, some sudden turning of our lives, we have caught glimmers at least of what the saints are blinded by; only then, unlike the saints, we tend to go on as though nothing has happened.

To go on as though something happened, even though we are not sure what it was or just where we are supposed to go with it, is to enter the dimension of life that is marked by faithfulness.

And that brings me to today and this week before us that the Church would call "Holy Week." And I want to talk about the disciples of Jesus. Now we have become accustomed to esteeming the disciples as exemplary in the faith. Something which the Gospel accounts do not support. During Holy Week, their elation on Palm Sunday very quickly turns into consternation; by Good Friday they

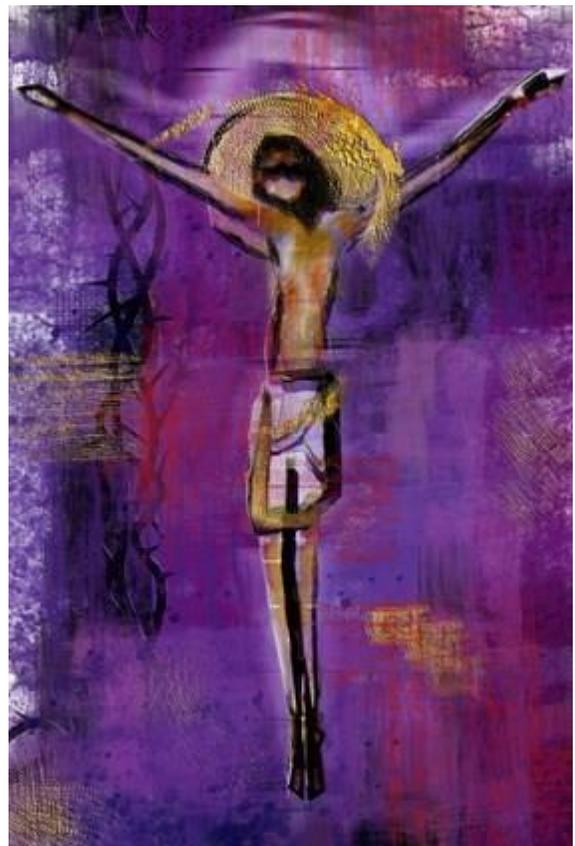
have become fearful and hysterical; by Easter they are both embittered and bereft. And through all of it they remain steadfast in only one thing – their disbelief. They simply don't get it that Jesus is the Messiah.

And this sets up a perplexing contradiction. The disciples enjoyed an intimate relationship with Jesus, unlike anything you or I could ever hope for. And yet they remained unconvinced. If we stop here then there is a warning to be heard about our experience. This ought to make us wary of those who assert too strongly that mere intimacy with Jesus of an intense, private, or exclusive nature is faith.

This is a fascinating, tempting, simplistic proposition that carries a lot of weight in our day and age, but it's not true to the witness of the scriptures we call Holy. And yet the hucksters and many a celebrity evangelist can be heard exhorting the faithful that if we just get ourselves close enough to Jesus then doubt of all sorts is dispelled. And worse yet some preach, get close enough to Jesus and healing of all sorts is possible. I wish it were so. But it just isn't. For all their unique experience of Jesus as recorded in the gospels, the disciples did not believe Jesus when he spoke or believe in him. Palm Sunday was an illusion, or at best it was a glimpse of something very real in our midst, trouble was the disciples, the crowds, the authorities all carried on as if nothing had happened. And so there had to be a cross.

We want to be healed, we want to live at unity with ourselves and with others. We want peace in our souls. It's the idealism of our times. To quote Jean Vanier, "New therapies engender more and better illusions amongst us. And each day new techniques are born which will bring about the long-awaited healing we so desire." Personally, I am more and more convinced that there is no perfect healing. Each human being carries their own wounds, their own difficulties of relationships and their own anguishes. It is a question of learning to live day after day with this reality and not in a state of illusion.

And that is why we need the Cross. The cross tells us there are no short cuts. The wood that went to make the cross was taken from a living tree, but a tree that has been cut, shaped, transformed. The process of cutting, stripping and reshaping is never easy or comfortable; it is protracted and painful. And once formed the cross itself stands there, its main beam thrust downwards into the ground, its arms stretching outwards, a balance of two opposing forces held together in a dynamic tension. And in that tension is another powerful image for what is at work in our lives. In the transformation that marks the Christian life and witness you and I must expect to be shaped, formed and re-formed and yet even in that process we can never expect to escape the tension that lies at the center of so many of our lives as we know them.



I have on my bookcase a reflection on the Rule of St. Benedict by Esther de Waal, it is titled, "Living with Contradiction," it is likely my favorite book. This is what she says about our predicament,

*“I suspect it is true of all of us that the older we grow the more urgent it becomes that we learn to live with the discords within ourselves, and live with them in such a way that we are neither fragmented nor exhausted, not succumbing to depression but rather learning how to hold tensions together and let them become powers for good, powers to liberate and affirm us, powers to release the energy to allow us to run the way to God.”*

She goes on to illustrate her point by describing a pillar in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. The crypt was constructed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when St. Anselm was abbot and archbishop. So powerful was the witness of St. Anselm that Stanley Hauerwas quotes him in the book I read this past week. Not bad to still be quoted 800 years later! Anyhow, on the top of each of the pillars are images carved in stone. The four sides of one show a succession of scenes: on the first, a carefree jester throws a fish into a bowl as he perches on another's head; on the second, a lion, an amiable creature with a curling tail, smiles an innocent, warm smile. On the third side the mood changes: here we find strange, devouring creatures that feel like elemental forces at work attempting to swallow and destroy one another. Finally, on the fourth side there is a double headed monster combining male and female features.



To quote de Wall again, *“here is the contradiction between the light and the dark, the masculine and feminine, the life-enhancing and the life-destroying. This portrayal was put here, in this holy place, by men who were not afraid to carve what they knew; and present it to God in the heart of their monastic church.”*

I find here a very simple message that we need to hear; being committed to God is about being real.

Something drew you into this enterprise we call the Christian faith. A moment an instant when you knew something was true. And like most of us you went about your life as if nothing had happened. . . . .and yet you know that everything happened. We are being drawn into the life of Jesus the Christ. And we come with all our contradictions, all our shadows the grand mixture of light and dark that makes us who we are. And there is perhaps one hard thing we have to accept. Jean Vanier is right. . . .It is perhaps an illusion that we will ever be healed in the ways we seek. . . .and that real healing is to live day after day with this reality and not in a state of illusion.

Consider Jesus:

He is a man surrounded by friends who yet withdraws to be apart in the desert. He is a son and yet he separates himself from his family and asks, “who is my mother and who are my brothers?” He stays alone with himself through long nights of prayer but still journeys on a Road that he knows will bring him to suffering and to death. He is the redeemer who on the Cross holds together the vertical, pointing towards God, and the horizontal, arms stretched out to embrace the world. In Christ all things will be brought together. In Christ all things will be well.

This is the knowledge, the belief, and the conviction of Christianity that we must be converted to if we are going to real and truthful. Apart from the contradiction that is the cross of

Jesus there is no health for us. Because only in the creative tension of the cross do we find energy enough to go forward to answer the call on our lives from God. The Christian life is not easy we will be shaped, formed and re-formed in the living out of our faith, and we will never escape the tension that lies at the heart of what it means to be human.

The goal of our lives is to seek God and to fall in love with the contradictions that make us human. It is an illusion to believe we are all simply good – we are not. It is equally an illusion to say anyone is all bad – even the worst among us carry the image of God. Our task is to find the center – the place where we can hold together the tensions of our lives in a creative balance that allows us to seek after God. And the Good news of the Christian faith is that not only are we seeking God. God is seeking us. And the message of this week is that she most often finds us at the foot of the cross.

Again, to quote de Wall;

*To seek God means first of all  
to let yourself be found by God.  
He is the God of Abraham and Sarah  
He is the God of Jesus Christ  
He is your God not because he is yours  
but because you are His.  
To choose God  
is to realize that you are known and loved  
in a way surpassing anything you can imagine  
long, before anyone had thought of you or spoken  
your name.*

This is the truth of our lives. We know it to be true because through some moment of beauty or pain, at some sudden turning of our lives, we caught a glimmer of something. And in the Cross of Jesus we see it reflected most fully. The way of Holy Week, the Christian way is not easy – it wasn't for the disciples – certainly wasn't for Jesus – and won't be for us. Our faith is not a way to escape our humanity – it is a way to embrace it. The beauty of this life is that it is the vehicle which has the potential to take us to God.

And in the contradictions that we know make up our lives is the energy to get us there – which is to say at the center of us all stands a cross – we have only to find it – accept it – and make it the place from which we will embrace our own lives – and at the same time embrace the God who created us. Ours is not an easy way – but it is real – it is truthful. And in the end, it is the path by which we will be made whole.  
Amen.

## Prayers

Caught between joy and despair,  
we yearn for the fulfillment of God's desire  
beyond the brokenness and neediness of this life.  
We offer thanksgiving for God's presence with us  
and petitions for the transformation of the  
church and the world.

In the **Anglican Cycle of Prayer**, we pray for the Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean, The Most Revd James Richard Wong Yin Song - Archbishop, Province of Indian Ocean & Bishop of the Diocese of the Seychelles;

For our **Bishops** Linda our Primate, Mark our National Indigenous Archbishop, Anne our Metropolitan, and Susan our bishop;

In the **Diocese of Niagara**, we pray for St. Paul, Fort Erie, The Reverend Dan Bennett, Rector, the Reverend Deacon Rod McDowell, the Reverend Canon David Thomas, Honorary Assistant and the people of that parish.

For all the clergy and people who share in the ministry of St. John's.

Today we pray for the following **people and their families**: Barbara Blythin, Brandon & Jody Boone, Donna Boone, Allan & Lil Booth, Susan Booth.

*Continued...*

And in our **community** we give thanks and pray for those who volunteer and offer leadership to the Terry Fox Run. And for all those who work on the front lines of our health care system, we pray for their safety, and give thanks for their vocation of healing and compassion.

We remember those who are close to us, for **those who are ill**: Lucas, Maria, Kelly-Lynne, Michelle + Karen, Jan, Aisling, Helen, Bev, Kathy, Adam, Wendy & Gary, Maryse, Gary, Cassandra & Max, Shirley, Lee, Mary, Jody, Carldavid, Barb, Mylee, Betty, Patti, David, the Guerin family the Sorley family, baby Parker, Betty, Margaret, Janice, Pat, and for others who need our prayers, ...

Life-giver, Pain-bearer, Love-maker, day by day you sustain the weary with your word and gently encourage us to place our trust in you. Awaken us to the suffering of those around us; save us from hiding in denials or taunts that deepen the hurt; give us grace to share one another's burdens in humble service. Amen.

### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive  
those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

### A Palm Sunday Litany

*(based on Luke 9:51, Matthew 16:24-25)*

“Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:51)

**Our Lord is on a journey,  
and the way leads through opposition and  
misunderstanding.**

Jesus invites us to follow him.

**This journey leads through the shadows of  
betrayal, the night of Gethsemane,  
the afternoon darkness of Golgotha.**

“Then Jesus told his disciples,

‘If any want to become my followers,  
let them deny themselves and take up their cross  
and follow me.

For those who want to save their life will lose it,  
and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.’” (Matt. 16:24-25)

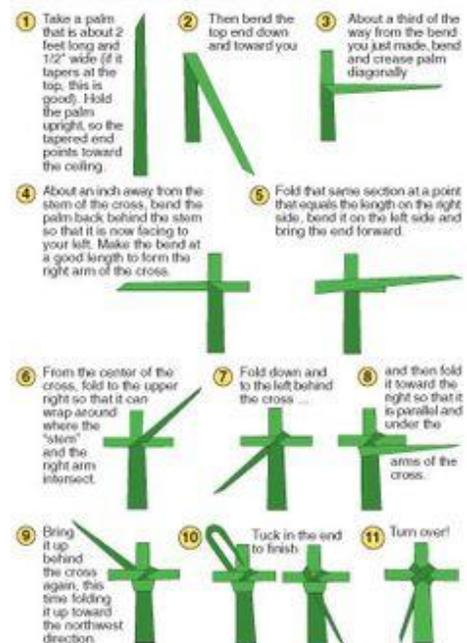
**Our Lord is on a journey.**

**May we have the grace to follow this Christ,  
and to give to him our very lives.**

**For in giving away our lives, we find them,  
and in dying we live.**

— from a Palm Sunday order of worship at  
First Baptist Church, Carrollton, Georgia.

#### How to make a palm cross



*A You Tube Video of how to do this....*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=4&v=tfZaD1iScP8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=tfZaD1iScP8&feature=emb_logo)

## Blessing of the Palms

Bless these parade palms, O God of Celebration.  
May they remind us of the simple joys of living.  
May we remember the excitement that comes  
with following Christ.

Bless these protest palms, O God of Justice.  
May they remind us that Empire  
is not a thing of the past.  
May they make us bold and brave to stand up  
against injustice.

Bless these funeral palms, O God of Comfort.  
May they remind us of the road that lies ahead.  
May they encourage us in times of grief and pain.

We give you thanks for the parade, the protest,  
the processional.  
Guide our steps through this holiest of weeks  
as we cry out together "Hosanna, Hosanna,  
Hosanna!" Amen.

*~ written by Rev. Caela Simmons Wood, Pastor, First  
Congregational United Church of Christ in  
Manhattan, Kansas.*

## Concluding Words

And now we lay down the palm branches.  
And with them we lay down our belief  
that there is another way for you to be God.

As the last echo of the final alleluia fades,  
so does our hope that this journey can end  
in any other way.

The week stretches ahead  
glory-less and pain-full

Whether we walk with all faith or none  
we look towards the cross,  
knowing it is both the most human  
and most divine  
of all journeys

travel the road with courage, with love,  
and with the uneasy peace that is the gift of faith  
into this holiest of weeks.

Amen.

*~ written by Cheryl Lawrie and posted on  
<http://boldthisspace.org.au/>*

