

ORDER OF SERVICE - PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 28th 2010

WELCOME

CHALICE

INTROIT Spirit of Life

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN Green 100 Long ago the lilies faded

PRAYER

READING

HYMN Red 145 Ride on! Ride on! In Majesty

READING

MEDITATION

HYMN Red 146 All glory, laud, and honour

ADDRESS

HYMN Green 102 Hosanna in the highest

OFFERTORY

NOTICES

BENEDICTION

HYMN Green 309 Lift up your voices, rise and sing!

ORDER OF SERVICE - PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 28th 2010

WELCOME - to our Palm Sunday service – and welcome to Iris Barrie, who joins us
from the USA

I have news of Ann and Graham. Ann is very slowly recovering, and they
both send their best wishes.

CHALICE CMC

As we gather here today to be reminded of
One prophet's bright light
May the flame we kindle here
Remind us that the light shines within us all

INTROIT *Spirit of Life*

CALL TO WORSHIP – Calvin O. Dame

(taken from 'Rejoice Together' pub: Skinner House books)

We come together now to worship
Spirit calls to spirit.
Hand reaches out to hand.
Heart joins with heart.
Voice lifts with voice in song of praise.
Come, let us worship together.

HYMN *Green* **100 *Long ago the lilies faded***

PRAYER - CMC

Holy Spirit of that which some call God and others do no name
We would give thanks for this day;
For the sunshine and the rain;
For the buffeting wind and the calm shelter;
For the awesomeness of creation;
For the beauty of life and death and renewal.

We would give thanks for the teachers and prophets of the ages
For those whose words have been carried like precious cargo
And placed gently into our hearts and minds
To strengthen our commitment to loving and being.

Here in this quiet time of prayer we would bring our cares
Our concerns for those we love who are ill, in body, spirit or mind.
Those who live in fear and face terrible days and nights
May our love and compassion ease their pain.
For those at war and those who would seek peace
May we have the courage to stand beside.
For those who are alone, lonely, friendless
May we be strong enough to be-friend.

Amen

READING - By Rev Cliff Reed, taken from "Celebration" printed by the Worship
Committee of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

Cities

The cities of the world have lost their way,
They don't know, on this great day, the way that leads to peace.
It is hidden from their sight.
Their enemies assail them and they strike back with hate.
A time is coming when they will be brought to the ground
With not one stone left standing on another.
Our faith is in illusions, in the corrupt systems of sinful humanity, in the false
security of wealth and weaponry.
Our hearts are turned away from you, O God.
Our city's gates are barred against you,
Your temple is filled with thieves;
It is no wonder that you weep!
Ride against us – on a donkey – challenge our pride with
Your humility,
Our closed hearts with your openness,
Our crippling fear with your love.
Break down our city's gates, raze its walls, purge its temple.
Drive out the ghosts and demons that infest our minds,
Seize your hearts and wrench them back to you!
All cities are Jerusalem now, all lie under the threat
That we have brought upon ourselves.
Challenge them all!
Enter them all!
Open our eyes that we may see the way that leads to peace!
Bring wholeness to our broken hearts and oneness to our broken world.
Ride our city streets and we will greet you with Hosannas!

HYMN Red 145 Ride on! Ride on! In Majesty

READING - Jesus entry into Jerusalem – taken from the “Golden Treasury of the Bible” published by Lindsey Press (out of print).

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and where come to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying, ‘Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering you will find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him. And if any man ask you ‘Why do ye loose him?’ say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.

And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, ‘Why loose you the colt?’ and they said, ‘The Lord hath need of him’.

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

Tell ye the daughter of Zion,
Behold, thy king cometh unto thee,
Meek, and riding upon an ass,
And upon a colt the foal of an ass.

And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. And many spread their garments in the way; and others cut down branches off the trees, and strewed them in the way. And when he was come nigh, at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying ‘Hosanna; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: blessed be the kingdom of our father David: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!

And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said, ‘I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out.’

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, ‘If thou hadst known, even thou, in this day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast up a bank about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in

on every side, and shall lay the even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thy knewest not the time of thy visitation.

And when he was come unto Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, 'Who is this?' and the multitude said, 'This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus entered the temple: and when he had looked around about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

MEDITATION - from an unknown source, taken from "Readings for Common Worship" published by the UUA, Boston Mass.

Blessed are the upright and the trustworthy, the spirit of promise is never broken and the meaning of whose words is true.

Blessed are they who honour all persons, and speak unto others as they would others should speak unto them.

Blessed are the merciful who remember their own need of mercy; who judge not harshly and are slow to take offence.

Blessed are they who are tender in sympathy, in whom the wellsprings of pity and consolation never dry up.

Blessed are they who are considerate of all creatures, who never thoughtlessly inflict injury or pain.

Blessed are the patient and the forbearing, the peacemakers, who by timely speech or silence heal the strife of humanity.

Blessed are the husbands and wives, friends and companions, who care tenderly for each other while respecting their differences.

Blessed are they who faithfully comfort each other in sorrow and rejoice together in prosperity.

Blessed are the fathers and mothers who guide their household well, sharing their children's interests with a sincere mind.

Blessed are they who honour their inheritance, and add to the growing treasure of humankind.

AMEN

ADDRESS

For anyone who knows the Christian story of Easter it is difficult to see Palm Sunday in isolation, without experiencing the apprehension about the events that follow. It's a bit like watching the first few minutes of a thriller, when the scene is being set. The characters are often presented as ordinary folk, just living their lives, taking children to school, going to work, doing the housework or the shopping, planning a trip, talking to friends. All this is going on in front of you yet you know, you just know that any minute now something horrible is going to happen. Sometimes you decide not to watch because you are already scared by the knowledge that watching will scare the doodads out of you. Reading or hearing the story of Palm Sunday is just like this. For all the story is one of triumphant entry and joyful hosannas, still that little worm in our head is wide awake and whispering about torture, whips, crowns of thorns, crucifixes and ridicule. We already know that there will be a betrayal, a capture, a mock trial. We already know that Barabas, the murderer, will go free. We already know that when push comes to shove then the good guy will not have the strength to stand up for what is right, the cock will crow three times and good will be denied through fear of reprisals. We know all this cheering and happiness will end in tears and great grief. And like the scary movie, we may sometimes wonder why we want to hear the story again. It's not as if we can all say, 'it's ok really, the good guy doesn't really die, well he does, but he comes back to life and then is lifted up into the sky to heaven" Some of us Unitarians might, but most of us, probably don't. So why tell this story?

I suggest that we retell the story because like all parables, allegories, fables and myths it has a meaning greater than the sum of its parts.

First though, let's be honest, it is hard to see the story of Palm Sunday without the knowledge that it is but a chapter in a larger story. It's hard because we have grown up knowing this story as simply part of a larger whole, and to perhaps a great

extent we cannot listen to the story of Jesus entry into Jerusalem without being influenced by the beginning and the end of the larger story, that is to say the story agreed by Athanasius and his fellow bishops in the 4th century when the doctrine of Christianity was being firmly established, and that which contradicted or confused was deemed to be heresy and summarily disposed of. The entry into Jerusalem is given lots of hype, its own "day" no less, but in truth that part of the story is about showing a fulfilment of prophesy, it is the part of the story meant to encourage Jewish hearers to accept Jesus as the long awaited messiah. But let's look at the story anyway, all stories, as Freud and Jung were later to show, have a resonance with our own lives, even if only sub-consciously.

So here goes, we are looking at Jerusalem in the days just before Passover, the city is jam packed with people all trying to find a room for the holy days, all trying to prepare for the Sabbath on which none may do anything that could possibly be construed as work, yet we are there to celebrate the create festival of Passover, joining together to give thanks for the actions of Jehova who made it possible with the on earth help of Moses, to get an enslaved people free and heading for the promised land, it is a huge celebration. We can already start to imagine the atmosphere in Jerusalem was electric. There were those already settled wandering about the holy city, going to the temple, buying offerings, greeting friends. Think Christmas, but in warmer weather, think people being nice to each other, smiling, courteous, happy, and you'll have the right feel. Then think of a pop star or tv celebrity suddenly appearing, think people flocking to welcome, ask for an autograph, take photos. I think we probably have the right feel now – not that I am equating Jesus to a pop star or a tv celeb, just that in our modern age these, perhaps sadly, are the icons of adoration and excitement – what was it John Lennon said of the popularity of the Beatles? Something about being more popular than Jesus. He was slated for that comment but there was, at that time, a great deal of truth in what he said albeit for a very short time.

So here we have a city buzzing with tens of thousands of visitors, more than doubling the population, all excited about the coming festival, all excited about being

in the most holy city, close to the temple of temples, the holy of holies, and who rides in with his friends, but a man who has been given the title of "messiah", who offers freedom – just like Moses, whose great leadership the town is all set to celebrate. But this messiah isn't a warrior, he's never killed anyone, only healed, his freedom is not from tyranny but from the yoke of earthly cares; but it seems the crowd miss that bit they want someone to help them get rid of the Roman overlords – now he'd be welcome. And the prophesy, don't forget the prophesy, Jesus is able to do miracles, heal the sick, he befriends the lowly, he is a man whose charismatic sermons have made him a talking point for many. He seems to fulfil the prophesy, he enters the city humbly and without ceremony, not on a mighty steed but on a lowly colt, and the people love it, they love him, they have high hopes of him, they expect much. Then after a quick look at the city, a brief nose into the temple, Jesus and the 12 leave for a quieter billet in Bethany.

If we look at this historically, why Jesus would go to Jerusalem at that time, he cannot have been blind to the dangers nor would he, I suspect have not that many scores of so called "messiahs" had been put to death by crucifixion during the time of his wanderings; he was certainly tempting fate. But perhaps that is the point of the story – even knowing how things might or would end, it was important enough to risk all. And if he hadn't then we might never have heard of this intelligent, caring young man from Galilee. Come to think of it, what is often talked about in orthodox circles of the Great Entry into Jerusalem, echoed in Michael's favourite Easter hymn, "ride on, ride on in Majesty" is but a necessary connection from the meat of the Jesus story outside the holy city to the action and ending within it.

If I were a novelist I would know that to make this story really powerful I would have to move the action of the hero into the most important place, the place where things happen, where the powerful people go, if he/she was to have the greatest impact – so do the Gospel writers. All those other would be messiahs were caught, tried, crucified, but all of them in small places around the sea of Galilee and how many of these score even a footnote in history? No, to be effective the end has to happen in Jerusalem and it has to be seen by as many people as possible. Tah..dah..

Jesus enters the city, is given a hero's welcome by the same crowd that will soon "boo" him to certain death! He is placed right at the heart of the capital, where his miracles and healings and often radical preaching in easy to understand parables are experienced first hand by the people in power, and therein lies the end of this story.

Jesus must be in the city, he must be there to act and speak at the hub of political and religious prestige in order for the dramatic ending to the story to happen. He cannot die quietly, there has to be a great fuss, a washing of hands, a bit of underhandedness, a little anger and a lot of righteous indignation. Without it there is a damp squib not a life defying death defying life ending that has empowered people for two thousand years.

When looking at this story can we see the triumphant entry into Jerusalem in isolation – only inasmuch as it draws on the beginning of the story in order that the ending can take place with elaborate ritual. As with the nativity story there are elements here of other stories in other times and faiths and as a story it has to have a purpose, little in life stands in isolation, our journeys are fed from that which has gone and influence that which will be. The story of Jesus coming into Jerusalem is a very deliberate one, the story seeks to fulfil prophesy, it moves the characters into place, it brings the people into centre stage, it allows the main character to provide evidence of his strength of character, his determination, his fear, his hope, his anguish, his humanness. It paints the penultimate picture and it reminds us that joy and sorrow are always inextricably linked, in all human life.

This story is not ended yet, between now and next Sunday, there is a week of dramatic action, parable, miracles, tables being turned, and the rich and powerful feeling uneasy, even threatened; within the circle of Jesus and his closest companions there will be irritation, confusion, leave-taking, betrayals and sorrow. But for now, all is well, the teacher still lives to teach, the disciples have yet more to learn from the master, the mother and friends another few days to care and nurture.

If there is a lesson to be learned from this part of the story it is perhaps this, that each day is precious, each day is an opportunity to share the goodness in life, to give thanks for all the wonder and beauty, time to put right things that are wrong. Each day is a precious gift, shame on us if we waste a single moment.

HYMN Green 102 Hosanna in the highest

OFFERTORY

NOTICES

- (1) Easter Sunday & Communion next week - 4th April
- (2) The Fellowship is ready for collection. Please try to contribute it makes it a long job if I have to do it all myself - thank you Sally for your piece.
- (3) please note that the May edition will be in two stages due to the timing of the GA meetings and my holiday.
- (4) Also please note that the May 1st great unveiling of the mural by Katie Hall followed by an exhibition and refreshments with brass band accompaniment will need helpers, do try and come to the Growth and Renewal Group on the first Tuesday in April in the chapel, to offer your assistance, we need all kinds of help like, hosting, manning the information table and serving teas on the day plus help with the decorating of the school hall and chapel.

BENEDICTION CME

Let us go in loving peace
Let that peace flow from us
To be as a balm for all to share.

HYMN Green 309 Lift up your voices, rise and sing!