**Nu’uanu Congregational Church, 2651 Pali Highway**

 **United Church of Christ Honolulu, Hawai’i 96817**

**Online Worship & Sermon April 5, 2020**

**PALM SUNDAY/PASSION SUNDAY**

GREETING/CALL TO WORSHIP *from John 14*

 Christ once said, “you will see me; because I live, you also will live.”

 We are invited to make our home in Christ’s word and story. So, come, let

us worship God together.

ENTRANCE INTO PALM SUNDAY

 This is a day that the Lord has made—Palm Sunday—let us rejoice and be glad in it.

If we were in our Sanctuary, we would all be holding and waving branches as a way of remembering how (Matthew tells us) the crowds welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. In the Gospel of John, we are told that the branches were, specifically, palm branches. Hence the palm fronds we usually have and wave on *Palm* Sunday.

 If we were in our Sanctuary, I would likely ask those of you who would be comfortable doing it, to take the hand of a child (or each other), and come out to the sidewalk with me to joyfully wave our branches at the cars passing by on Pali Highway.

 I would invite you to do that because this is a day to process and to rejoice. Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem. He rode into the city in humbly, but also willingly, to show himself to those who would receive him.

 It was, and is, a joyous day. This was and is, and will always be God’s gift to us, and it is right and appropriate to share that joy. Even now, Jesus’ dearest desire is to come into heart of our lives, just the way he did two thousand years ago.

In the Gospel lesson we will hear later, he went to Jerusalem to give his all, his everything to God’s mission of love and grace. He went there to give himself to us in a way that defined God’s love, and our lives, for all time. He went, and he comes now, to bring us life, and life everlasting.

 On this morning, with all of us maintaining our “social distance,” I would like to ask you to use your imagination to think of what it must have been like to be in that crowd! Imagine the excitement and the wonder. What do you think the people were hoping for? Were their hopes like ours? Were they different? Who do you imagine you are standing beside? What could you share with him/her about what *you* know about Christ?

Now, imagine being shoulder-to-shoulder, right now, on the sidewalk in front of our church! What do you hope the people passing by in their cars are thinking as they see us with our palm branches, waving and smiling? If you could tell one of them what your journey with Christ has been like, what would you tell him/her?

For just a moment, let us imagine ourselves back at our church; in our Sanctuary; but also out on the sidewalk with our palm branches. Let your heart and mind wander back there—just for a moment. Try to imagine what Christ would like to bring to you in that moment.

Let us pray…

Well, I know we cannot all be here in our Sanctuary right now; certainly *not* shoulder-to-shoulder. However, what I would like to remind you is that we are only separated *physically*. In every other way that really counts—in our commitment to Christ and the love the Holy Spirit cultivates among us—we are still together. Through Christ, we are one body.

This is what the Spirit has done and continues to do. So, I pray we will remain hopeful and thankful throughout this time of challenge because this is what the Spirit and the psalms encourage us to be.

Let us hear the first piece of Scripture for this morning:

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

***A Song of Victory***

 *1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
   his steadfast love endures for ever!*

 *2 Let Israel say,
   ‘His steadfast love endures for ever.’
19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
   that I may enter through them
   and give thanks to the Lord.*

 *20 This is the gate of the Lord;
   the righteous shall enter through it.*

 *21 I thank you that you have answered me
   and have become my salvation.
22 The stone that the builders rejected
   has become the chief cornerstone.
23 This is the Lord’s doing;
   it is marvelous in our eyes.
24 This is the day that the Lord has made;
   let us rejoice and be glad in it.
25 Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
   O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*

 *26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
   We bless you from the house of the Lord.
27 The Lord is God,
   and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
   up to the horns of the altar.*

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

 *29 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
   for his steadfast love endures for ever.*

CALL TO CONFESSION

 Let the joy we feel be the foundation of our feelings before God who invites us to cast upon God’s loving heart all of the burdens we carry—all of our worries, all of our sins and short-comings that make our hearts heavy.

A MOMENT OF SILENCE – *Let us take a moment to silently give God all that burdens us.*

AN ASSURANCE *Matt. 21:5; Phil. 2:7, 9*

 God has come to us, humble, in the form of a slave, to free us from the weight of sin and death. Jesus’ obedience has released us. We are forgiven, in the name of the one who is exalted beyond what we can comprehend: Christ our Savior and Lord.

 Having accepted the freedom Christ offers, let us hear his good news:

READING OF HOLY SCRIPTURE: Matthew 21:1-11

## *Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem*

*1When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2saying 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. 3If anyone says anything to you, just say this, “The Lord needs them.” And he will send them immediately.’ 4This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,
5 ‘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.’
6The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9The 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!’
10When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ 11The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’*

HOMILY *The Difference Between a Parade and a Procession*

 One of the things I have been missing in the season of social distancing are parades. I love parades. I have two favorite things about parades.

 First: everyone is happy and excited at a parade. I suppose it’s the spectacle of the parade participants themselves. They are there to strut and to cavort—to capture our attention and make that one moment along the parade route memorable—to make themselves memorable.

 A lot of parades are also competitions—for best float, or best costumes, etc. There are also entertainments of other sorts: clowns, beauty queens and other celebrities riding in convertibles, waving at the crowds, and the like. They’re all a lot of fun and I like those parts, too.

 However, my Second favorite thing about parades are the brass bands. I love all of the music that marching bands play—the John Philip Souza pieces, but also more modern pieces—I love just about anything they are willing to play, and I am always sorry when the band has marched by and their music begins to fade.

 However, there is always something close behind to take their place. So, we move on to the next thing.

 Eventually, the last band has marched by; the last clown has honked his horn and thrown the last bit of candy to the crowd; the last float has turned the corner and headed back toward the parking lot. Even the brass bands are done.

 Parades come to an end.

 I have no doubt that a lot of people on that first Palm Sunday thought that they were at a parade when Jesus came riding by and all the people crowded closer, straining to get a glimpse of him.

 There were, perhaps, even people who were in the wrong place. They may have meant to go to the *other* end of town to greet the Pontius Pilate, who was also entering the city that day. Now, *that* was a parade!

 As one writer has described it:

*Traditionally, Pilate paraded into Jerusalem on the first day of Passover Week, entering the west gate – the front gate – with legions of chariots, horses, and foot soldiers, dressed for battle and armed with swords and spears.  Rome’s authority would not be questioned.  The majesty with which Pilate enters the front door of the city was meant to inspire awe and fear, respect and obedience.*

Those folks who had gone looking for that parade must have been surprised and confused to see Jesus—one lone man riding on a humble donkey. That must have wondered what in the world was going on.

The people who went to see Pilate enter had gone looking for raw power. He was the one they would look to to enforce the laws and maintain order—especially during Passover when there would have been thousands and thousands who had come to celebrate at the Temple.

Some may have even come to meet with others to plan a rebellion against the Romans. Those whose lives and livelihoods depended on Rome’s iron fist rule went to the parade looking for and expecting a ruler who inspired awe and terror; and who punished those who stepped out of line in any and all ways.

We still have parades like that all over the world. There are still parades that feature strong-man military leaders. He usually sits in the bandstands these days watching as legions of military troops march by in lock-step, saluting as they go. Their heavy steps echo through the city squares and shake the ground in a great show of noisy bravado.

The men and women in uniform are usually followed by heavy artillery and armored vehicles with huge canons, transports carrying guns and missiles, and every other kind of weapon of destruction you can think of.

All of it is designed to show how strong we are, and how weak everyone else is. We are the power. We are in control.

We don’t really have *that* kind of parade here in this country…not yet, anyway. However, that kind of display of raw power seems to be one of the reasons parades were invented. We invented them to show everyone who is in power.

Those of you who remember *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, will remember one of the most dastardly villains: the Borg. They had a refrain that every strongman determined to rule by force would love. Their refrain was: *Resistance is futile!—*that is what that kind of parade is all about.

Jesus had set his face toward Jerusalem. He did not ride a war horse. He rode a humble donkey. He had made up his mind to enter the city and to make known more fully the power that had sent him on this mission—the power of love and mercy which is God—the strongest and most complete power on earth because instead of breaking hearts and spirits, bones and bodies, God’s power transforms and builds them, lifts them with compassion and forgiveness, and helps all to begin again.

So, it may have *looked* like a parade in the beginning, but Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem was truly *not* a parade. It was a *procession*.

The two words are sometimes used interchangeably, but they are different, and here is how: a procession, according to Websters’, “continuously move(s) forward—as the way in which the Holy Spirit’s procession from God is on-going.

Parades end and the streets are emptied of everything but the litter they leave behind. Jesus, on the other hand, began something that day that has been processing on all these many years.

On this particular Palm Sunday, we cannot be in our Sanctuary together, holding and waving our palm fronds. However, the procession of Christ’s love for us is still alive and active. It is in you and in me. It is in the world in every prayer and gesture we make for peace and compassion for each other and God’s good earth.

It is in every prayer and gesture that turns from the world’s garish displays of power and dominance, and chooses instead the desire to serve, to preserve, and to forgive and work for peace, healing, and reconciliation. It is in every prayer and gesture that imitates Christ, glorifies God, and follows the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit.

A procession is something that continues—as God’s love will always continue.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Taylor Ramos-Young, Marla

Rachel Stuke and all who are serving on the front lines of the pandemic.

DOXOLOGY

Ho‘onani i Ka Makua mau,

Ke Keiki me Ka ‘Uhane nō,

Ke Akua mau ho‘omaika‘i pū,

Ko kēia au, ko kēlā au. ʻĀmene.

1HOLY COMMUNION

*Please set before yourselves bread and “wine.”*

*The Spirit has brought us together, even in this moment.*

TELLING THE STORY

 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, and eat: this is my body.”

 Then he took the cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

 I tell you, I will never drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

 O give thanks to the Lord, who is good; [Psalm 118:1]

 whose steadfast love endures forever!

 Holy, holy holy Lord, we lift our hearts to you with thanks and praise; you opened the gates of righteousness to welcome the outcast and the despised, you established your kingdom on the stone the builders rejected; you entered the city in triumph on the back of a humble donkey; you came in glory to reign enthroned on the praises of the poor.

 Therefore we cry to you: Hosanna! Lord, save us!

 **Blessed is the one who comes in your name.**

 Holy, holy, holy, Lord, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Savior, betrayed by a friend, he remained faithful to the last; denied by a disciple he claimed us as his beloved; condemned without cause he forgave without condition; stripped of all dignity he clothed us with compassion; mocked by the crowds he spoke only truth and grace; broken on the cross he died to make us whole; buried in a tomb he would give us endless life.

 Therefore we cry to you: Hosanna! Lord save us!

 **Blessed is the One who comes in your name.**

BLESSING THE BREAD AND WINE

 Holy, holy, holy Lord, pour out your Spirit upon us, and on these gifts of bread and wine, that in the eating of this bread, and the drinking of this cup, we might be nourished and made one in the body and blood of Christ our Savior.

 Give us one mid as Christ Jesus: who emptied himself that we might receive fulness of life; who humbled himself and so became highly exalted; who gave up his own birthright to receive the name above every name; who suffered and died in shame to put an end to death forever.

 Therefore we cry to you: Hosanna! Lord save us!

 **Blessed is the one who comes in your name. Amen.**

THE LORD’S PRAYER

RECEIVING THE ELEMENTS

Take of the elements remembering: this is the bread of life and the cup of forgiveness—

Christ’s body, broken for you and for many; Christ’s life, poured out for you and for many.

AFTER THE HOLY MEAL

 Lord, we give you thanks for this meal. We thank you for your gracious ways toward us, and for the love you continue to pour out to us, even today. We pray that this bread and wine strengthens both our body and spirit so that we may be strong in our faith and our desire to love the world in your name. Amen.

CLOSING WORDS

 The joyful procession has come to its conclusion. I pray that the excitement and joy of Palm Sunday will deeply embed itself in our memories. This is what will feed us in the days to come.

 Now, with Christ, let us turn our face toward his passion with this story:

OUR ENTRANCE INTO PASSION SUNDAY

2“The Thief”

All I did o’ hea on dis earth, was trying fo’ be big and important somehow, some way. You know, to make one name for myself, so da peoples know me, even if wuz kinda bad. Just to get one stink eye was good, to me. So maybe I give ‘um da look, or I put on gangsta clothes, or whateva. Folks would whisper when I was near. Or some even said it “Dat kid is no good” or “He’s pilikia.”

What I can say? It’s true. Evere time I came to one fork in da road, I took da easy way. “Sliding by, or worse” is what it wuz. First, I only thought bad stuff. Then, somehow it became my way of life. It became me. I was bad. Pilau. Impure. The one to blame.

You know, peoples talking neva botta me. I knew I was bad. But shame. . . hila hila . . . now, that was sum thing else. I was always hiding in the shadows. But now, I was in the light. Looking people in da eye—(his emotions interrupt him) Looking people in the eye as I. . . .

Dat day, all my crimes was listed. First, was read aloud. Den, they wen nailed ‘um above my head. As I stay hanging there, the pain was sooo sore. But there was sum ting even worser. It was something nobody could see. It was, all of a sudden, understanding the person I really was. The person nobody knew. Or I thought nobody knew.

Den, wen he said that I would be with him in paradise, he looked right into my soul. What else could I do den, but let him in? I could feel myself slipping away. Pau. Hope was gone now. Any chance fo make up fo my bad stuffs was over. Make. I was getting what I deserved for who I really was. And there he hung next to me, dying for crimes He neva committed. And he telling me dat I could come wit him. Who eva told me dat? Who eva said in my whole life, “You with me” . . ?

He knew erething ‘bout me. And I really neva know him. But I believed him. That’s all he needed.

And then, he never let me go.

BLESSING

1 *Feasting on the Word Worship Companion,*

Year A, Vol. 1

2 *TheSkitGuys.com*