

<Children's/Interactive time>

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<Distribute palm fronds>

It's Palm Sunday; tradition has us handing out palms. What do you do with them? <Let them respond>

Why do you do that with them? <Let them respond>

Some people wave them, some hit others with them, some fold them into a cross, some might even weave a basket with them. Come Ash Wednesday, do you know what I do with them? <Let them respond>

While praying for the people of the church and those on our prayer list, I burn [the palms I folded into crosses the prior Palm Sunday] into ash. What does that represent to you? <Let them respond>

I like to think of God burning away our sins, leaving a reminder of what we have done and what God has done for us so that we do not sin again.

I also like the imagery of this occurring as we pray for one another in love. It takes love and grace to eliminate hate and sin.

As a pastor, I learned that we must not mix the ashes with water to put on people's foreheads, but can use oil. Do you know why? <Let them respond>

Ashes in water are acidic and may burn skin. A well-meaning person may try to do something good but cause hurt and anger instead. How should we respond to that? <Let them respond>

We should not accept what will hurt us and we should try to help the person to do better. If they will not listen, we can warn others about the danger they pose. It is important that people hear the truth so that they can make informed choices.

Have you ever heard the phrase “Out of the mouths of babes”? What does it mean to you? <Let them respond>

Children tend to be more sensitive than time-hardened adults to what is good and nurturing versus what is evil and painful. Thus, they may more readily identify the truth about what is going on.

The children in Matthew’s gospel continued praising Jesus in the temple after the parade and the overturning of tables. Jesus quoted Psalm 8:2 to the temple leaders before leaving for the day: “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself.”

May we all see the love of God with the sensitivity of children & respond to the world with the grace of Jesus for all, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel lesson

In this reading we look at the actions of those who were offended by Jesus’s overturning tables in the temple, contradicting their teachings, and thwarting their attempts to trap Him with trick questions.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/tis-trial-caiaphas/>;
credit: the Brooklyn Museum / FreeBibleimages.org

Matthew 26:1-5, 57-66; 27:1-2 (NRSVUE)

¹ When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples,

² “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

³ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the courtyard of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,

⁴ and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

⁵ But they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

⁵⁷ Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

⁵⁸ But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end.

⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that

they might put him to death,

⁶⁰but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward

⁶¹and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' "

⁶²The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?"

⁶³But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you,

From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy.

⁶⁶What do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death."

^{27:1} When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death.

² They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

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The Word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"

UMH #286>

Message: Marching Orders



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/journeys-end-a-new-start/palm-passion-sunday-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/palm-passion-sunday-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Amazing Lord of gracious love,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may turn away from the worldly sin-filled paths of hate and fear, and follow Your call to share love and peace instead. Amen.

We receive "Marching Orders" today:

"Holy Week begins with a journey—or rather, picks up in the middle of a journey to Jerusalem."

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Jesus had just recently raised Lazarus from the dead and the crowd was celebrating. Their response was so great that those in power in the temple said, "Look, the world has gone after him!"

The leaders of the temple in that day were under a lot of political pressure, as they felt responsible for the well-being of their people. Had not God put them in charge, through the prophets? Everyone was to tithe to them, and they were to keep the people in God's favor (by telling them what to do & helping them do it).

There were many who wanted to have an independent Hebrew kingdom again, but the might of Rome occupying the region was a threat to their entire existence. So when Somebody rode in with crowds cheering Him on, the temple leaders wanted to control Him before He brought the wrath of Rome upon all of them.

They were focused on human power and living in fear, hating their enemies. We see people doing that today; far too often, we get caught up in it too. Christian nationalists try to force everyone to adhere to their rules and miss God's message of love in their anger.

And before anyone gets mad at me for making things too political, I want to share something the Rev. Dr. Mark Sandlin expressed vividly on Facebook:

(<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10163550148067740&set=pcb.10163550152072740>)

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Palm Sunday wasn't a parade.
It was a protest.
There were two processions entering
Jerusalem. One from the empire.
One from the people.



Jesus entered on a humble donkey.
 The Empire entered with horses and chariots.
 'Hosanna' didn't mean 'Yay.' It meant: Save us. Do something. Change this.



And when people start hoping out loud...power starts paying attention.
 (again) Jesus entered on a humble donkey. The Empire entered with horses and chariots.



Jesus wasn't killed for being nice. He was killed for being a problem. We're still living this story. When systems feel threatened... they respond with pressure, fear, and force.



It's easy to shout "Hosanna."
 The real question is: What happens next?
 When hope rises...Will you show up?
 And will you stay when it costs something?

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I want you to notice that Jesus did not give up on the leaders of the temple. He confronted their bad behaviors, explicitly quoting from the Hebrew law like protestors quote from the US constitution today.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/journeys-end-a-new-start/palm-passion-sunday-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/palm-passion-sunday-year-a-graphics>

But we are not to focus merely on what is lawful according to our constitution. We are to focus on what Jesus taught us about loving one another and to protest what is cruel and sinful. I went to the protest in Hamilton yesterday not to seek vengeance against MAGA but to stop the pain and hurt that the ultrarich (and their enablers) are causing to vulnerable populations in our country.

Jesus took time to explain to those running the temple what was not right, and then let those objecting to Him choose how to respond. God did that with the Israelites throughout the Old Testament stories, usually warning them through the prophets. Everyone was allowed to choose for themselves whether to act in faithful love or in fearful hate.

In each case, when people focused on doing what God was telling them to do, they moved forward into new life, a better situation than they were in. When people instead remained focused on mundane world priorities, their rejection of God led them into worse sin, leading ultimately to their downfall.

God's love calls us into action, to reject sin and begin living anew. Jesus died on the cross to show us that nothing the world does, nothing we as individuals might do, can stop God's love from bringing new life for the faithful.

God's love for us - for you - is stronger than the worst thing sin drives us to fear. And God loves every sinner that intensely, including our enemies, those upon whom we may wish terrible harm. Do you hate Trump? or Biden? God loves him and demands that we leave room for the Holy Spirit to work on that soul.

So if we profess to love God, it is NOT okay to demonize others or to categorize any group of people as subhuman. People who access mass media are hammered every day with new targets to hate and belittle - it is a deliberate tactic used to influence the thinking of viewers and keep them with an addictive-like desire to be in the hater group.

None of that truly follows Jesus's teaching, example, or commandments. As Christians, we need to strive to do better. We need to:

- ✦ Praise God with all that we are and do. That means following the commandments, all of which are based on love and involve nurturing healthy relationships.
- ✦ Turn away from hate and fear-mongering. Reject it.
- ✦ Look for ways to foster love between people. Typically service is the most effective means for this, meeting needs and showing in truth how the love of God is the source of all that is good and life-giving.
- ✦ Encourage others to seek love too. Help them to see they can put aside hate and do not have to be driven by fear. Let them know they are not alone

and that they have the opportunity to build healthier, stronger relationships with others in the love of God.

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Let our lives be a protest against all forms of sin as we serve God.

Let us bring hope to our forlorn world as humble agents of change, standing firm in the love of Jesus against the fear-driving pressure of sin.

Let us dare to bring peace with justice into situations of turmoil and the light of the Holy Spirit into the darkness of pain and suffering.

Jesus gave us our marching orders. Let us get moving!