

First Presbyterian Church of Redlands

Reverend Cheryl Raine

April 5, 2020 - Facebook Live

Palm Sunday – *The Holy Way*

The Call **Matthew 21:1-9**

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. He said to them, "Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anybody says anything to you, say that the Lord needs it." He sent them off right away. Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, "Say to Daughter Zion, 'Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, that donkey's offspring.'" The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then he sat on them. Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

First Reading **Isaiah 35:1-10**

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,

the desert shall rejoice and blossom;

like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly,

and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,

the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,

the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands,

and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,

"Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,

with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you."

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,

and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,

and the thirsty ground springs of water;

the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,

the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

First Presbyterian Church of Redlands
Reverend Cheryl Raine
April 5, 2020 - Facebook Live
Palm Sunday – *The Holy Way*

⁸ A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The Living Word of God
Thanks be to God!

Second Reading *A Call to Prayer by Bishop Easterly*

As I walk the streets of this beautiful and burdened land, I hear a sweet melodious voice that rings out – it rings out across the mountains and the plains; it rings out in the streets and in the sanctuaries; it rings out in the marketplace and in the home. The voice is captivating and enthralling, the staccato of the words are foreign and yet familiar, and as if drawn to the beat, my body begins to slowly rock. At this moment I forget my individualism and isolation and recall that the call is heard around the world at varied times and diverse places to join the holy conversation that is prayer. This holy dialogue is shared in tongues I cannot speak. It is shared with those standing next to me and those across the globe. We cannot be that different if we share this same call, for the call I hear, the call we hear, is only a reminder of the call you gave millennia ago to remain in this holy dialogue through the language of love. To pray to One greater than ourselves. Adonai. Jehovah. Eloheim. Yahweh. Allah. Dios. Mulungu. Tuhan. May our hearts be drawn into this sweet and holy conversation. And let us remember that we do not pray alone, rather our voices join the cacophony of voices around the world in praise of the One, the One greater than ourselves.

The Message *The Holy Way*

We walk the streets of this beautiful and burdened land these days with appropriate physical distancing and homemade facemasks. The news bears down on us in ways that raise our anxiety levels and heightens our fears. Our medical professionals are bracing themselves for the surge anticipated in the coming days and weeks, causing them deep concern as to whether or not there will be enough capacity and supplies in our system to meet the needs of patients as well as keep our medical professionals safe. Our world is certainly burdened and I

First Presbyterian Church of Redlands
Reverend Cheryl Raine
April 5, 2020 - Facebook Live
Palm Sunday – *The Holy Way*

am sure we all feel this weight in varying degrees and ways. I know I do intermittently during daylight hours, but most especially if I awake in the wee hours of the morning. Our world is certainly burdened.

Yet, even in the midst of this burdened world, our world is also beautiful. The beauty of neighbors reaching out to care for one another. The joyous bird songs that fill the air as the sun rises each day, even if it rises unseen above dark gray clouds. The beauty of essential employees working to provide for our basic necessities. The mountains around us stretch heavenward with beauty and majesty. The beauty of generous donors committing resources to help the most vulnerable in our community. The beauty of our furry friends that are without a shred of anxiety, as they wag their tails or curl up in our laps offering us loving companionship. The beauty of spring bursting forth in every variety from delicate white petals to sun yellow flowers, from petite lavender flowerets to vibrant pink blossoms. The beauty of dedicated first responders who sacrificially rush in while everyone else is rushing out. The beauty of musicians who freely offer their gifts through the power of technology and for the poets and artists who help us express what we cannot. Our world is certainly beautiful.

Yes, we walk the streets of this beautiful and burdened land, just as our forefathers and foremothers of faith walked during the days of Isaiah the prophet. Listen to his prophetic words offering hope to a beleaguered people, “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom... A highway shall be there and it shall be called the Holy Way... it shall be for God’s people.” This holy way was restorative and hope-filled. There were no predators waiting to pounce and devour God’s people. This poem of redemption ends with promises, “Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Oh, how we long for this Holy Way right now. We long for days when sorrow and sighing shall flee. We long to focus once again on the beauty of life, rather than the weight of our burdens. Yes, we long for our world to be restored to everlasting joy and gladness.

Our forefathers and foremothers of faith in first century Palestine longed for these days as well, for burdens plagued their faith community, too. Under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire their lives were under constant scrutiny. The Empire held sway over their religious leaders, the chief priests and the scribes. And their own people, the tax collectors, took advantage of them. The people of God had longed for a Savior for far too many generations. They longed for a conquering king, for someone like King David who would rule with power and might. Their land was burdened and they hoped for a savior who would use swift power and might to reestablish Israel in all its glory.

Yet, did you notice the animal of burden that Jesus rode into Jerusalem this day? “Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey.” Humble? No, we want a savior that is confident, fearless and courageous; not one that is humble! Riding a donkey? No! We want a savior who rides a strong and valiant steed. Can you see more clearly today that Jesus was not the Savior that people longed for? They hoped, as we often do, that God would just use God’s power and might to overthrow what is wrong. Just do it, God! We know you can! Just rid this world of all violence and war. Just rid this world of greed, abuse and corruption, and anxiety,

First Presbyterian Church of Redlands

Reverend Cheryl Raine

April 5, 2020 - Facebook Live

Palm Sunday – *The Holy Way*

apathy and fear. Just rid this world of microscopic viruses that devastate the way of we live and claim our loved ones. Just do it, God. Use your strength, use your might, use your power, and use it now, God!

But, we are reminded by the words of Scripture of another type of king, “Your king is coming to you humble.” Your king is not going to wield a sword or gather troops. Your king is not touting his own importance. Your king is not hungry for power and fame or even for your praise. But the crowd gathering around Jesus that day missed this truth, for they welcomed him with a huge parade. There was shouting, singing and probably dancing as they spread their cloaks on the road and laid down cut branches. The joyous crowd drew the attention of anybody and everybody in Jerusalem, making those in power nervous, both in the church and the state, as they shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Just like the people of Isaiah’s times and of Jesus’ time, we want to unleash God’s power to fix what is not right, yet Scripture reminds us that God’s ways are not always our ways. Listen to God’s word through Isaiah’s voice, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” [Isaiah 55:8-9].

This Holy Way is God’s way. This Holy Way is so simple that even fools won’t go astray says Isaiah. Yet, this Holy Way is not easy for any of us because it is a path of descent rather than ascent. It is a path of surrender rather than a grab for power. Our culture has trained us all too well how to climb and strive and conquer. It has taught us how to grasp for what we want the way we want it. Yet, this Holy Way is not our way; it is God’s way. This Holy Way requires humility. It requires surrender to the reality that God is God and we are not. This Holy Way requires us be of the same heart and mind as Christ, the One who did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. With humility Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a beast of burden the Holy Way of descent, of complete surrender even though it cost him his life.

What about us? What is the way we are walking through life? Are we willing to walk the Holy Way of descent? Are we willing to surrender our ways to God’s ways? Are we willing to humble ourselves, not worrying about our own importance or even our own future?

In this time of extreme uncertainty, these texts are asking us, whom do we trust? Do we trust this sweet melodious voice that rings out from deep within us and from all around us? Do we trust the holy dialogue that gathers us from across the globe in all of our beautiful diversity in praise of the One, the Holy One? Do we trust that our hope is in the One, the Holy One? And will we claim with certainty that we are not ever isolated and alone, no matter what the future holds? In this time of extreme uncertainty, whom do we trust with our very lives?

My friends, we are not in control of what comes next. Just as the disciples didn’t know how the week was going to unfold before them. They had no idea that their shouts of Hosanna would turn to “Crucify Him.” They had no idea that their beloved teacher would end up on a cross. They had no idea that they would scatter, or deny, or lock themselves away in fear.

We are not in control, but we do have a choice as to which path we will travel. There is the Holy Way, the way of trust, the way of love, the way that is life giving in the midst of our

First Presbyterian Church of Redlands

Reverend Cheryl Raine

April 5, 2020 - Facebook Live

Palm Sunday – *The Holy Way*

death-dealing world. The question is: Will we travel the Holy Way and abandon our climbing, controlling, striving, and conquering, and surrender our anxieties and fears? Will we travel the Holy Way by humbly entrusting ourselves to God alone?

Receiving Joe's text message last night at 7:02 P.M. convinced me yet again of the truth that I am not in control. My heart sank hearing that he wasn't feeling well and as a precaution he felt he shouldn't participate with me here in this sanctuary. We pray even now that it is nothing more than a common cold. So, this morning Paul and I are here alone, yet we know that we are not alone. God is with us and God is palpably present in our shared stories even though we are physically separated. In this moment we are walking this beautiful and burdened land together on the Holy Way.

May we surrender to the One, the Holy One, the One who is pure love poured out for all of humanity and for heaven and earth. The Holy Way is a humble way.

"Return us, O God, by your Holy Way of love to you, to ourselves and to each other." May this time of extreme uncertainty bind us together ever more deeply with the One who humbly rode into Jerusalem on a beast of burden. Amen.