

## Worship Service - "Strange Fruit"

Palm Sunday, Year C,

10th April, 2022

**Luke 19:28-40 NIV / Luke 20:9-19 NSRV**

**Prelude/Procession of Palms** (*Palms distributed as people enter*)

**Opening Music** [Video] [Red Letters](#) **dc Talk**

written by Chris Harris, Kevin Max Smith, Mark Heimermann, Michael Tait, Toby McKeenan, CCLI song number 2800327, 1998 Achtober Songs (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) Blind Thief Publishing (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) Out of Twisted Roots Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246, posted to YouTube by atariangamer

## Welcome Guests / Announcements

**Pass the Peace**

**Gathering Music**                      *Hosanna, Loud Hosanna*                      **238**

## Call to Worship

One: Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

**All: Hosanna! Save us, O God!**

One: Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!

**All: Hosanna! Save us, O God!**

One: Blessed is the coming reign of our God!

**All: Hosanna! Save us, O God!**

One: As we enter this holy week, we come in joy and trembling;

**All: Hosanna! Save us, O God!**

## Invocation

Extravagant God,  
lavishing your love on our poverty of heart:  
inspire us to live with generosity,  
to love life so that we may find it again,  
and thus the world will be filled  
with the fragrance of your love;  
through Jesus Christ, who offers himself for us. Amen.

## First Gospel Reading - Luke 19:28-40 NIV

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them,

“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them.

As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.

As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

**Hymn**

*All Glory, Laud, and Honor*

**237**

**A Time of Prayer**

**Joys and Concerns**

**Pastoral Prayer**

You are on your way to Jerusalem, precious Lord. You are one your way to suffering and to death for the sake of our freedom and our salvation. This is mystery and wonder. Our hearts overflow into songs of praise. “Hosanna!”, we cry with the crowds. “Blessed are you who comes in God’s name!”

Yet, you puzzle us: you puzzle us with your suffering love that is more powerful than our brokenness; you puzzle us with your freely chosen humility that brings blessings

in our weary places; you puzzle us with your forgiveness that summons us beyond our hurt.

Liberating Saviour, you make us uncomfortable so that you can lead us into more life and deeper wonder; so that God can take who we are and break us open, and bless us and give us to the world.

Grant us grace to welcome this holy restlessness, that we may live by the power of your Spirit, and in your name. Amen.

## **Gospel Lesson      Luke 20:9-19 NSRV**

He began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time.

When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed.

And he sent still a third; this one also they wounded and threw out.

Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’

But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, ‘This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.’

So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?

He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Heaven forbid!”

But he looked at them and said, “What then does this text mean: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”

When the scribes and chief priests realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people.

## Message - *“Strange Fruit”*

So this week we come to the end of our Lenten journey with Jesus through parables. We've arrived with him in Jerusalem, with all the fanfare we've come to associate with Palm Sunday. Though it's interesting to note that Luke's version of this story doesn't mention palms at all, just people throwing their coats on the ground to line his path. But tradition is tradition, so we still have our palms to wave. And tradition can be important. It gives us structure and stability, a sense of familiarity so we know what to expect, how things are going to work.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem has brought him to the center of the Jewish faith tradition. This is where the Temple is, the priesthood and the scribes, and many of the Pharisees. It's the capital city of Judea, the center, where tradition is kept, and where tradition maintains the status quo. It works for them. It's kept this religious and political machine running since they rebuilt the Temple after returning from exile a few centuries earlier. Drawing on this tradition, Jesus sends his disciples out to get a donkey colt to ride on.

It's pretty clear throughout his public ministry that Jesus has a pretty good grasp of Jewish prophetic writings. He knows Zechariah 9 prophecies, “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Coming from Jericho, he comes over the Mount of Olives to do so, also calling on Zechariah 14, where God comes to stand on the Mount of Olives to redeem Jerusalem in apocalyptic battle. Jerusalem may be the center of “tradition” but Jesus is certainly good at drawing on that tradition for his own purposes as well. He pulls from these prophecies to fit into the messianic expectations that people had for how their savior would arrive, but that's the extent to which he fills that mold.

They are expecting some great display of divine might like the rest of those Zachariah passages relate: land being split apart, Israel's enemies being scattered and destroyed, the captive people of Judah set free. After all, that's what common tradition traditionally expected. Yet he instead draws on Isaiah's suffering servant imagery, one who is humble and suffers in order to bring salvation. But on this triumphant Sunday, they only see this messiah entering as expected on a donkey foal, with his disciples singing his praises, calling him Lord, and king. The city was brimming with Jews from all around, in town for Passover. If you could get there, it was the best place to observe one of the most important holidays of the religious calendar.

I'm sure there were many in the crowd who did not benefit from the “traditional way” of doing things, who were from a different side of the tracks from those in the temple who were trying to hush all this commotion up.

The religious authorities were concerned about Jesus, not only as a potential threat to the traditions that kept them in power, but also because of the quite different procession entering from the other side of Jerusalem.

While Jesus was leading his humble procession among the commoners from the East, Pilate would have been leading a grand military procession of Romans from his coastal base to the West. They don't want the Romans to hear of a competitor king to challenge their lackey vassal king Herod Antipas. Yet Jesus tells them that even the stones would cry out if the crowd was silent. And those stones have seen a lot over the years: invasions and bloodshed, exile and return, oppression and suffering. Now God's response and salvation was passing by and over them. Hope had finally arrived.

After Jesus arrives in the Temple complex, he teaches to the crowd and tells the parable we read this morning about the vineyard, which again draws on the teachings of the prophets in Isaiah 5. In that passage, Israel is described as God's vineyard in which only bad grapes grew.

Certainly in our parable today the owner of the vineyard is also a clear allusion to God. The owner sends servants to collect his share of the profits, whom the tenants reject and abuse, much in the same way those in power dealt with Israel's prophets. Then the owner sends his own beloved son whom the tenants kill thinking they will get his inheritance. Like the other parables in our Lenten journey, there is yet another lens we can look at this parable through.

While the parable is an allusion to Jesus' imminent death, it is also a window into a different view of atonement, that God sent Jesus, knowing that he would be rejected. God sent Jesus like the landlord in our parable, with a message for the tenants. Jesus was sent to proclaim the reign of God. And he didn't come as a son of kings, as a royally anointed first-born of David's human line. He was sent from the margins, from Nazareth in backwater Galilee, the lowly son of a carpenter. He is sent from the margin to the very center of traditional power.

Theologian Rebecca Chopp explains the dynamic between the center and the margins in her article "When the Center Cannot Contain the Margins." The center refers to the dominant order and the margins refer to those alienated from the power of the center. Chopp argues that speaking from the position of marginality requires imagination; therefore something unimaginable in the center, can come from this de-centered location.

Throughout history, new discourse and creative ideas have come from the periphery, often changing the course of history by altering the paradigms that underlie social reform and transformation. Think of the Civil Rights movement, union-led labor law reform, the Protestant Reformation; these events did not start in the center of power, because they challenged that center's sense of normality, that group's sense of security. For this reason, she argues that we often need to celebrate our "marginalized" position, reminding us of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."

But the marginalized are not to be romanticized. To stand in that position generates much pain, struggle, hard work, suffering, and even the cross. The crowd in today's story shouts "Peace." They have heard about the miracles that Jesus performed. The people's cries of

yearning, hoping, and longing fill the road to the center. Their cries are for deliverance and peace, which means a radical reordering and transformation of society.

The road to Jerusalem is a long one, from the peaceful entry to the most turbulent moment of the cross, death, and resurrection. This journey shows what often happens when the center of power and tradition meets those from the margins of society. The question we need to ask ourselves is where do we fit in?

Are we like Jesus, walking in the margins, or have we moved to the center, and embraced the power of the traditions we find there that make us feel comfortable and secure, while keeping others at the margins?

Jesus, after quoting Psalm 118, that the stone rejected has become the cornerstone, declares that all those who fall on that stone will be broken. When we fail to reach out to, or worse, reject those on the margins that God has always included, we risk breaking apart and losing our mission. Jesus demonstrates a different way than that of the center, than that of the traditions we are tempted to cling to for our own security.

As the tenants of the vineyard today, how do we react to the messengers that are sent today. God, the landlord, still sends prophets. Those who call out on behalf of those on the margins: the poor, the immigrants, legal or not, the oppressed: those of color, or different sexuality or gender identities, those in prison, the least of these in our culture's pecking order. And how many in our culture react if his son was sent to us today, a brown skinned man born in the West Bank of Palestine? As tenants of this vineyard, how can we make sure our vines produce bountifully, so that the landlord doesn't remove us?

We're called to reach those in need, whatever that need may be. We know this soil has potential, we only need to look at our history to see that. We just need to find new varieties and methods to produce fruit that may be different from what we've produced in the past. I pray that we can seek the guidance of the Spirit to lead us to new fields where we can be the successful vintners we are all called to be. May we find our way back to join with our God at work in the margins where we can reimagine the promise of Palm Sunday for our time. Amen.

## **A Call to Serve**

Beloved, there will always be need in the world,  
and the church is called respond to this need.  
Let us give of ourselves – share what we have –  
not just from the abundance that has been given to us,  
but from the devotion and dedication inspired in us  
by the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

## SERVICE OF COMMUNION

### Invitation

Here at this Table, where all are welcome,  
the weary are sustained,  
the broken are offered healing,  
the ignored are welcomed as family,  
and the simple gifts of the bread and cup  
are transformed into the treasures of your heart  
as you pour out your Spirit in these moments.

### Words of Institution

As the bread whose brokenness reminds us  
of the One who was willing to suffer for all,  
may we be reminded that the Lord needs us  
to worship with the outcast as well as the privileged,  
to work with the hopeless as well as the arrogant,  
in every place we can, we every word we speak.  
As the cup of grace is offered to us, may we remember  
the One emptied himself for those around him,  
and that he needs us to do everything we are asked,  
as we bend our knees to reach down  
to seek justice for the oppressed,  
to cradle the heart-broken  
to hear the stories of 80-year-olds  
who are reliving their childhoods

Today we remember the Upper Room, where Jesus and his disciples gathered to share their final meal together.

Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying,  
“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

*(Break the bread and lift the cup)*

As we eat the bread and drink the cup together, let's reflect on the sacrifice made for us, and how we might sacrifice ourselves for others to be Christ in this world.

## **Partaking in the Holy Meal**

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

And when we are gathered by the One  
who will come in peace and glory  
to bring us to the Table of grace,  
we will sing of that name above all other names,  
forever praising you for your steadfast love,  
God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

### **Hymn – Move in Our Midst                    418**

#### **BENEDICTION** - [Responsive]

One: Now we will set aside our palm branches,

**All: to go and serve at God's side  
in a broken and fearful world.**

One: Now we will pick up our cloaks  
and follow Jesus wherever he leads,

**All: to learn from those the world ignores,  
to be touched by the grace within them.**

One: Now we will sing songs of wonder,

**All: as we work alongside the Spirit,  
sustaining the weary with peace and hope.**