

**Whispers of the Holy**:

**A Lenten/Easter Lectionary Worship &**

**Sermon Preparation Event**

**Ash Wednesday**

February 26, 2019

**Introduction**

Austerity.

Darkness.

Penitence.

Repentance.

Forgiveness.

Grace.

Mercy.

Justice.

These are the words that come to mind as I ponder Ash Wednesday worship; images of a darkened sanctuary; God’s people entering and departing in silence; an entirely different evening worship space that just weeks ago was filled with parishioners and guests gathering to worship and sing on Christmas Eve. It is a new season in the Christian calendar, and our worship together on Ash Wednesday moves us into that season to prepare us for the journey to the cross and, ultimately, the empty tomb.

**Background** *Book of Worship: United Church of Christ 2012*

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent for many in the Christian church. The forty days of fasting (not counting Sundays) may begin with the imposition of the ashes on the foreheads of the faithful.

During the moving ancient ceremony, the ashes – from which Ash Wednesday gets its name – were placed on the foreheads of the faithful with the words from Genesis: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

While the imposition of ashes is not widely used in the tradition of the United Church of Christ, the service of penitence and confession is used before the celebration of Holy Communion. Very often the service provides periods of extended silence for personal prayers and reflection.

Ashes may be placed on the forehead1 of each worshiper as part of the act of confession and as a sign of mortality and penitence. Traditionally, ashes are prepared before the service by burning palm or olive branches and grinding the ashes together with a little water or oil. The leader’s thumb is used to transfer the mixture from a shallow bowl to each participant’s forehead. A towel2 or napkin is provided for cleaning the hands of the leader.

*Note: these are not in our Book of Worship:*

1Some worship leaders offer to impose the ashes on the back of worshipers’ hands.

2Pro tip: Bunch up several paper towels, moisten with water, then add a few drops of dishwashing detergent to the wet towels to clean your thumb following the imposition of ashes; rinse off the remains of the soap on your thumb with the clean side of the wet paper towels.

**Scripture Readings for Ash Wednesday** (Years A, B, C)

Psalm 51: 1-13

Psalm 103

Joel 2: 12-19

2 Corinthians 5: 20b – 6:2

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21

*NRSV texts of these readings are included at the end of this resource.*

**Call to Worship** (responsively) *Book of Common Worship: Presbyterian Church USA 1993*

One: Let us worship God.

God sent Christ into the world

not to condemn the world,

but that the world might be saved through him.

**All: God’s love endures forever.**

One: God is our refuge and strength,

a present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear

though the earth should change,

though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

though the waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

**All: God’s love endures forever.**

**Gathering Prayer** (unison) *Book of Common Worship: Presbyterian Church USA 1993*

**Gracious God,**

**out of your love and mercy**

**you breathed into dust the breath of life,**

**creating us to serve you and neighbors.**

**Call forth our prayers and acts of tenderness,**

**and strengthen us to face our mortality,**

**that we may reach with confidence for your mercy;**

**into Jesus Christ our Lord,**

**who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,**

**One God, now and forever.**

**Amen.**

**Confession of Sin** *Book of Worship: United Church of Christ 2012*

*Worship leader offers this invitation:*

As disciples of Jesus Christ,

we are called to struggle against everything

that leads us away from the love of God and neighbor.

Repentance, fasting, prayer, study, and works of love

help us return to that love.

I invite you, therefore,

to commit yourselves to love God and neighbor

by confessing your sin

and by asking God for strength

to persevere in your Lenten discipline.

**Prayer of Confession** (responsively)

One: Let us pray.

**All: Most holy and merciful God:**

**We confess to you and to one another,**

**and to the whole communion of saints**

**in heaven and on earth,**

**that we have sinned by our own fault**

**in thought, word, and deed,**

**by what we have done,**

**and by what we have left undone.**

One: We have not loved you

with all our heart, and mind, and strength.

We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We have not forgiven others

as we have been forgiven.

**All: Have mercy on us, O God.**

One: We have been deaf to your call

to serve as Christ served us.

We have not been true

to the mind of Christ.

We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

**All: Have mercy on us, O God.**

One: We confess to you, O God,

all our past unfaithfulness.

The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives,

**All: We confess to you, O God.**

One: Our self-indulgent appetites and ways

and our exploitation of other people,

**All: We confess to you, O God.**

One: Our anger at our own frustration

and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

**All: We confess to you, O God.**

One: Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts

and our dishonesty in our daily life and work,

**All: We confess to you, O God.**

One: Our negligence in prayer and worship

and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,

**All: We confess to you, O God.**

One: Accept our repentance, O God,

for the wrongs we have done.

For our neglect of human need and suffering

and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

**All: Accept our repentance, O God.**

One: For all false judgments,

for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors,

and for our prejudice and contempt

Toward those who differ from us,

**All: Accept our repentance, O God.**

One: For our waste and pollution of your creation

and our lack of concern for those who come after us,

**All: Accept our repentance, O God.**

One: Restore us, O God,

and let your anger depart from us.

**All: Favorably hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.**

**Amen.**

*Silence is observed.*

**Imposition of Ashes**

*The worship leader may invite those who wish to receive ashes to come forward. The leader may apply ashes to the forehead of each person with these or other words:*

One: Remember that

you are dust,

and to dust

you shall return.

*Silence is observed.*

*After all who wish to receive ashes have received them, the prayers of confession may be concluded with these or other words.*

One: Accomplish in us, O God,

the work of your salvation.

**All: That we may show forth your glory.**

One: By the cross and passion of our Savior,

**All: Bring us with all your saints**

**to the joy of Christ’s resurrection.**

**Amen.**

One: Almighty God does not desire the death of sinners,

but rather that they may turn

from their wickedness and live.

Therefore, we implore God to grant us true repentance

and the Holy Spirit

that those things which we do this day

may be pleasing to God,

that the rest of our lives may be lived faithfully,

and that at the last we may come to God’s eternal joy;

through Jesus the Christ.

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Anthem or Hymn of Response** *Create in me a clean heart, O God* NCH #784

**Psalm 51: 1-13** (responsively)

One: Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy

blot out my transgressions.

**All: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,**

**and cleanse me from my sin.**

One: For I know my transgressions,

and my sin is ever before me.

**All: Against you, you alone, have I sinned,**

**and done what is evil in your sight,**

**so that you are justified in your sentence**

**and blameless when you pass judgment.**

One: Indeed, I was born guilty,

a sinner when my mother conceived me.

**All: You desire truth in the inward being;**

**therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart.**

One: Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

**All: Let me hear joy and gladness;**

**let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.**

One: Hide your face from my sins,

and blot out all my iniquities.

**All: Create in me a clean heart, O God,**

**and put a new and right spirit within me.**

One: Do not cast me away from your presence,

and do not take your holy spirit from me.

**All: Restore to me the joy of your salvation,**

**and sustain in me a willing spirit.**

**Then I will teach transgressors your ways,**

**and sinners will return to you.**

*If an anthem or special music was offered prior to the Psalm:*

**Hymn of Response** *Create in me a clean heart, O God* NCH #784

*If Hymn #784 was sung prior to the Psalm:*

**Hymn of Response** (reprise) *Create in me a clean heart, O God* NCH #784

**Scripture Reading(s)**

**Homily or Meditation**

*From Rev. Maren Tirabassi, UCC pastor, some seeds for Ash Wednesday sermon preparation:*

Ash Wednesday is the starting point of Lent. We are marked with ashes as we begin the season. We go from feasting to a season of fasting, praying, and giving.

Or perhaps we can think of Lent as a season of personal training, of discipline and preparation, to return to spiritual fitness. It’s a time when, through confession, we admit and wrestle with our issues, vulnerabilities and weaknesses … and get to know ourselves better. We seek healing and balance.

This is also an opportunity to understand that we are beloved for whom we are: messy and imperfect and broken. Just as we are beloved for whom we may become. Because the gift of this season, ultimately, is grace. We can prepare, we can focus … yet we cannot earn the boundless love toward which we are reaching. It is simply offered to us, regardless of how perfect or imperfect we are. Just because.

Ashes symbolize mortality, as well as humility and contrition. The proudest members of society, in many faith traditions, don sackcloth and wear ashes as signs of humility, to express sorrow, or to demonstrate a desire for reconciliation and forgiveness. Ashes represent, like “dust to dust”, our elemental origins and remind us that our bodies will return to the earth. Within our faith, we also believe that while our bodies are formed from organic materials, our living selves are filled up with and energized by Breath, Wind, or Holy Spirit, which animates life and connects all of us.

Traditionally, people receive ashes today, Ash Wednesday, as a smudge or cross on the forehead. We come to this season in a messy way, wearing our imperfection on our faces. Messy, sad, sorry, tired, angry, grateful, hopeful, happy, curious … we enter into this time of preparation, on the journey toward Easter.

**Hymn** *Beneath the Cross of Jesus* NCH #190

**Sending Forth** (responsively) *Book of Common Worship: Presbyterian Church USA 1993*

One: May the God of peace

make you holy in every way

and keep your whole being –

spirit, soul, and body –

free from every fault

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**All: Amen.**

One: Go in peace to Lord and serve the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**Scripture for Ash Wednesday**

(Years A, B, and C)

**Psalm 51: 1-13**

1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
   according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
   blot out my transgressions.  
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
   and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,  
   and my sin is ever before me.  
4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
   and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
   and blameless when you pass judgement.  
5 Indeed, I was born guilty,  
   a sinner when my mother conceived me.

6 You desire truth in the inward being;  
   therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.  
7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
   wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
   let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.  
9 Hide your face from my sins,  
   and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
   and put a new and right spirit within me.  
11 Do not cast me away from your presence,  
   and do not take your holy spirit from me.  
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
   and sustain in me a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
   and sinners will return to you.

**Psalm 103**

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
   and all that is within me,  
   bless his holy name.  
2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
   and do not forget all his benefits—  
3 who forgives all your iniquity,  
   who heals all your diseases,  
4 who redeems your life from the Pit,  
   who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,  
5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
   so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

6 The Lord works vindication  
   and justice for all who are oppressed.  
7 He made known his ways to Moses,  
   his acts to the people of Israel.  
8 The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
   slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
9 He will not always accuse,  
   nor will he keep his anger forever.  
10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
   nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
   so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;  
12 as far as the east is from the west,  
   so far he removes our transgressions from us.  
13 As a father has compassion for his children,  
   so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.  
14 For he knows how we were made;  
   he remembers that we are dust.

15 As for mortals, their days are like grass;  
   they flourish like a flower of the field;  
16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
   and its place knows it no more.  
17 But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting  
   on those who fear him,  
   and his righteousness to children’s children,  
18 to those who keep his covenant  
   and remember to do his commandments.

19 The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,  
   and his kingdom rules over all.

*continued*

20 Bless the Lord, O you his angels,  
   you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
   obedient to his spoken word.  
21 Bless the Lord, all his hosts,  
   his ministers that do his will.  
22 Bless the Lord, all his works,  
   in all places of his dominion.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

**Joel 2: 12-19**

12 Yet even now, says the Lord,  
   return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
13   rend your hearts and not your clothing.  
Return to the Lord, your God,  
   for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,  
   and relents from punishing.  
14 Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,  
   and leave a blessing behind him,  
a grain-offering and a drink-offering  
   for the Lord, your God?

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
   sanctify a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;  
16   gather the people.  
Sanctify the congregation;  
   assemble the aged;  
gather the children,  
   even infants at the breast.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room,  
   and the bride her canopy.

17 Between the vestibule and the altar  
   let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.  
Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O Lord,  
   and do not make your heritage a mockery,  
   a byword among the nations.  
Why should it be said among the peoples,  
   “Where is their God?” ’

18 Then the Lord became jealous for his land,  
   and had pity on his people.  
19 In response to his people the Lord said:  
I am sending you  
   grain, wine, and oil,  
   and you will be satisfied;  
and I will no more make you  
   a mockery among the nations.

**2 Corinthians 5: 20b – 6:2**

20So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Chapter 6

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2For he says,  
‘At an acceptable time I have listened to you,  
   and on a day of salvation I have helped you.’  
See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

**Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21**

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

16“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

19“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Prepared and presented by Rev. Kathy Lawes,

Associate Conference Minister, Illinois Conference UCC

**First Sunday of Lent**

March 1, 2020

**Possible Lectionary Scriptures:**

Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Ps 32

Rom 5:12-19

Matt 4:1-11

**Recommended Scripture of the Day:**

Romans 5:12-19

**Theme:**

The "living death" of sin

**Possible** **Sermonic Titles:**

A Death That Won’t Die

The Outpouring of God’s Grace

In Search of a Grace Divine

The Twins; Grace and Mercy

**Call To Worship**

Leader: Let us gather today and lift our voices in song and praise to God.

**People: For once we were lost in sin and cried out to God for a Savior.**

Leader: And God heard our pleas and in Jesus Christ we have our salvation.

**People: So let us sing and give praise to Almighty God!** Leader: And let us walk in the ways of the Lord forever!

**All: Blessed be the name of the Lord!**

**Prayer Of Gathering/Invocation**

Almighty God, we invoke Your presence into our worship service today. You have rescued us from the living death and eternal damnation that sin would bring us. Impress us again with the magnitude of your grace: that, seeing again the awful end from which you have saved us, we may glory in the freedom and life that you have given us. In the holy name of Jesus we pray. Amen

**Prayer of Confession**

God of extraordinary grace, we acknowledge with sadness our responsibility for the condition of sin that dominates our lives, as well as for the many acts of sin that it produces. We confess that, were You merely just and fair, and not gracious and merciful, we should suffer much more than we do as a result. Forgive us, we pray, and grant us from the rich storehouses of Your mercy the grace that we need to become faithful and productive children of Yours, purveyors of light and life rather than of darkness and death. In the forgiving name of Jesus we pray. Amen

**Prayer Of Assurance**

Loving and gracious God, we thank you for the receiving the confessions of our sins of omission and our sins of commission. Please restore us to a righteous standing in Your sight. We joyfully receive the assurances of Your pardon. May we be instruments of Your glory to the world? In the blessed name of Jesus The Christ. Amen.

**Prayer of First Fruits**

We are blessed with the responsibility of sharing God’s love and the teachings of Jesus to our family, neighbors and to the *“ends of the earth*.” When we are “joined to Christ” our attitudes are revised and our goals are transformed to be in sync with the Kingdom of God. Sharing our resources is one way that we willingly participate in making the kingdom of God visible and tangible. In the loving name of Jesus we pray. Amen

**Blessing of First Fruits**

Nothing that we give You was made by us from nothing, but is our reshaping of what You have already created. You give us more than we deserve, Divine Provider. What we give is not all that we have, but we are determined to do our share in the work of your family, the Church. Receive and multiply our gifts, that they may be used to build Your Kingdom. In the blessed name of Jesus we pray. Amen

**Benediction**:

Gracious God, unto Him that is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless before the presence of Your exceeding Glory. To the only wise God, our Savior, be majesty, dominion, power and glory now and forever more. Thank you for the blessings of Your Never-ending Grace and Mercy. May Your gifts empower us to take Your ministry outside the walls of this church so that we may be Your light in our community. May the remnant of Your light reveal Your love to our community and beyond through our words, actions, thoughts and deeds. Strengthen and encourage us to boldly proclaim the goodness of Your gospel to the ends of the earth. In the holy name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

**Ideas For Music:**

“Amazing Grace”

“Your Grace and Mercy” - Mississippi Mass Choir

"Victory In Jesus"

"All Hail The Power Of Jesus' Name"

"Because He Lives"

“Jesus Paid It All”

Prepared and presented by Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff,

Acting Associate Conference Minister, Illinois Conference UCC

**Second Sunday of Lent**

March 8, 2020

**Color**: Purple

Theme: Born Again

**Scripture:** John 3: 1-17 (Note: have scripture recited, not read)

**Call to Worship:**

L*: We are in the presence of God. Leave the places you have known and walk with God. Leave behind thoughts of limitation and imagine****.***

P**: But we are secure where we are.**

L: *Ahh, but New ways of being in this world is possible for each of us.*

**P: Can’t God bless us where we are, and as we are?**

L: *If you trust enough to move from the places you have known, and question the systems around us, you will be blessed. God is our light and our salvation.*

***P: Lord, we open ourselves to you. Direct our paths and open our hearts and minds.***

L*: In this place, in every place,*

***P: for this time, for all time.***

***All: Let us worship our God.***

**Gathering Prayer:**

O God our Creator, your kindness has given us a new morning. Help us to leave yesterday, not be anxious about tomorrow, and appreciate the unique gift of today. Open us to the movement of your Holy Spirit that we may desire to bring new order, new possibility, and new hope in this land, and new life in the depths of our being. Amen.

**Call to Confession***: May we confess, as Jesus did in the wilderness. Gracious God forgive those things we have done which have caused you sadness, and those things we should have done that would have brought you joy. In both we have failed ourselves, and you. Bring us back to that place where our journey began, when we said that we would follow you. Let us confess together*…

**Unison Confession:**

Holy One, who is able to make all things new, we are thankful for the gift of each day being an opportunity to do better, to be better. We ask forgiveness for wanting new life without being willing to die to old ways of being. Forgive us for doubting that new life, rebirth is possible. Midwife our spirits, that we may be born into a new state of consciousness; that we may be born from above.

**Words of Assurance:** *Even in our reluctance, even in our brokenness, God provides a path to wholeness and renewal. When we confess our shortcomings, God has mercy on us and is generous with forgiveness. Through Jesus Christ we are forgiven….and that is good news. Thanks be to God.*

**Dedication of Offering:**

May these gifts indicate our gratitude for our many blessings. May the spiritual nourishment we receive today strengthen us for continued service. Amen.

**Benediction/ Sending forth**

God of our past. God of our future. God of this present age. As we leave this place, but not your presence – May God not take us away from danger, but give us the courage to face it. May God not take us away from difficulty, but give us strong hearts to bear it. May God not take us away from evil, but give us the power to overcome it. May the love of God surround you, the peace of God dwell in you, and the justice of God compel you. Go in peace. Amen.

Prepared and Presented by Rev. Michelle Hughes,

Designated Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship, Transformation, and Vitality,

Illinois Conference, UCC

**Third Sunday of Lent**

March 15, 2020

**Lent 2020- Detox! Toxicity is about degrees of intensity. Poison will kill you from the beginning. Anything can be toxic by the quantity or intensity. Eschewing abusive and dysfunctional influences from our lives is what we are about during the season of Lent.**

**Detox Whiteness Matthew 4:1-11**

**Detox Gender Matthew 17:1-9**

**Detox Intimacy John 4:5-42**

**Detox Family John 9:1-41**

**Detox Body John 11:1-45**

**Detox Conflict Matthew 26:14-27:66**

**Detox Utopia/Dystopia Matthew 28:1-10 (Still Noodling on this one!)**

**Week 3-Detox Intimacy/Relationships**

**Through societal influence, we’ve learned to normalize abuse and unhealthy dynamics in our intimate relationships. And in fact, this scripture has been used to promote a toxic approach to relationships and intimacy. I’m calling for folx to detox this well.**

**Scripture for the Day: John 4.5-42**

**Call to Worship**

One: For all who thirst, drench yourselves in these holy waters.

**All: We are thirsty, hungry, ready for growth!**

One: God’s well is deep, and satisfying

**All: We bring all of who we are-**

One: authentic

**All: open**

One: inquisitive

**All: attentive**

One: exhausted

**All: angry**

One: empty

**All: longing.**

One: Our God breaks down all destructive barriers that stand between us and what gives life.

**All: The invitation of Liberating Love is what we seek!**

**Gathering Prayer**

Holy One, we come seeking loving sacred connection. Where the toxicity of the world takes from the most vulnerable without hesitation, empowering the insecurity of the powerful,You remind us of who we are, and what’s made possible in loving relationship. May we choose to drink from your well of wholeness and liberation. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession**

Holy One, when we dismiss the stories of the vulnerable, and uplift the feelings of the powerful, forgive us.

When we swallow our own wisdom, and internalize what the world says we are, forgive us.

When we see our differences as barriers to relationship, destroying possibilities for wholeness for ourselves and others, forgive us.

**Assurance of Grace**

Our God frees us from all toxic messages of self-loathing! May you know your belovedness and to whom you belong!

**Offertory Call and Blessing of Gifts**

Our God of liberation provides ways out of toxic relationships and institutions. May these gifts help bring about healing and reform!

**Sending Out/Benediction**

Be thirsty! Be attentive! Be liberated! Go in peace. Amen.

Prepared and Presented by Rev. Rachel Bahr,

Pastor, Plymouth United Church of Christ, Grand Rapids, MI

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

March 22, 2020

**Possible Lectionary Scriptures:**

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

**Recommended Scripture of the Day:**

1 Samuel 16:1-13, John 9:1-41

**Theme:**

God’s vision is broad and vast

**Possible** **Sermonic Titles:**

Coming of Age

Where the Spirit Lands

Do I See What You Know?

**Call To Worship** (based upon Psalm 23)

Leader: We gather together to worship and praise our ‘Good Shepherd,’

who cares so well for us.

**People: The Lord is our Shepherd,**

**and we have all we are ever likely to need.**

Leader: We gather together to worship and praise our ‘Good Shepherd,’

Who safely leads us and gives us strength for the journey.

**People: The Lord is our Shepherd,**

**Who allows us to rest and who renews our energies.**

Leader: We gather together to worship and praise our ‘Good Shepherd,’

Who offers us a feast when we are under pressure.

**People: The Lord is our Shepherd,**

**Whose unfailing love us always there waiting for us.**

Leader: We gather together

**ALL: TO WORSHIP AND PRAISE GOD!**

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**Prayer Of Gathering/Invocation**

Magnificent God who sees all that we can see and everything that we cannot, we gather in awe of your vision that is broad and vast. Be with us now as we worship you. Awaken us to your holiness, inspire us with your creative power, and peel back our layers of anxiety and fear. Enliven us to trust fully in your love for us as we struggle and strive to be who you call us to be, in Christ’s holy name. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession**

O Wise and Gracious God, we are each a small dot, a pixel, in the picture of your amazing creation. You have designed us to work together. And yet, we continue to separate ourselves, to live as if our strength lies in our individuality. We confess to you that we often find it easier to celebrate our solitude, to thrive on our individual gain, and to seek ways to lift ourselves above the canvas as more important than others. We pray that you will impress upon us your definition of “one” as together, and that we will seek both the ability and the courage to move away from “one” that is each of us alone. Forgive us, we pray.

**Prayer Of Assurance**

We thank you, O God, for your steadfast love and forgiveness. Guide us, we pray, through the life and love you show us in Jesus the Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

**Call for the Offering**

God sees all things! God sees our comings and our goings, our strengths and our weaknesses, our needs and our desires. God sees in us the potential we do not yet see in ourselves. I invite you to share your offerings and gifts out of the abundance that is God’s vision for us!

**Blessing of First Fruits**

All that we have, all that we give this day, Holy One, already belongs to you. Bless these, our gifts, and give us vision to use them to glorify you. Amen.

**Benediction**: (adapted from Ephesians 5: 9-14)

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light! Seek that which is good and right and true, and try to live in a way that pleases God. Look to the light of God’s love shown to us in Jesus. Do not hide from it or ignore the struggles of the world but awaken to God’s call. Arise, O sleeper, and Christ will give you light!

**Ideas For Music:**

“Amazing Grace: My Chains are Gone”

“Greater” – Mercy Me

"This Is a Day of New Beginnings" – Brian Wren

"Offering" – Andra Moran

Prepared and presented by Rev. Kim Wood,

Acting Associate Conference Minister, Illinois Conference UCC

**Fifth Sunday of Lent**

March 29. 2020

**Musical Call to Worship**

**Welcome and Sharing of Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

Pastor: As we enter this space, let us discard the stresses of life if only for a while.

**All: Our stresses and worries are discarded and swept away.**

Pastor: May the peace of Christ fill your hearts with new life.

**All: We breathe in hope and healing and exhale fears and doubts.**

Pastor: Let us commune with the Sacred within us and around us.

**All: Let us sing praises and speak prayers. Let us worship our living God.**

**\*Opening Song “O Jesus Christ, May Grateful Hymns” New Century #212**

**Children’s Moment Katrina Furman (She, Her)**

**\*Passing the Peace**

**Unison Prayer**

**God of light and new life, we hear your whispers of the holy as we turn the pages of your Word in our meditations, in our prayers, and in our worship. You call to us, a voice from the wilderness still speaking to all your children giving us direction and leading us home. Unite us we pray. Resurrect in and around us that which desperately yearns for a second chance. Amen.**

**Reflection Song “Dare You to Move”**

**Scripture Reading John 11: 1 – 45 Christina Breen (She, Her)**

**Sermon “Friends of the Church” Pastor Dan (He, Him)**

**Prayer Song “We Are Your People” New Century #309**

**Pastoral Prayer The Lord’s Prayer (words on screen)**

**The Offertory**

**Offertory Prayer**

**Closing Song “Renew Your Church” New Century #311**

**Benediction**

**Postlude**

**Reflection Song “Dare You To Move”**

By Switchfoot – 2000

Welcome to the planet

Welcome to existence

Everyone’s here

Everyone’s here

Everybody’s watching you now

Everybody waits for you now

What happens next?

What happens next?

I dare you to move

I dare you to move

I dare you to lift yourself up off the floor

I dare you to move

I dare you to move

Like today never happened

Today never happened before

Welcome to the fallout

Welcome to resistance

The tension is here

The tension is here

Between who you are and who you could be

Between how it is and how it should be, yeah

I dare you to move

I dare you to move

I dare you to lift yourself up off the floor

I dare you to move

I dare you to move

Like today never happened

Today never happened before

Maybe redemption has stories to tell

Maybe forgiveness is right where you fell

Where can you run to escape from yourself?

Where you gonna go?

Where you gonna go?

Salvation is here

I dare you to move

I dare you to move

I dare you to lift yourself, to lift yourself up off the floor

I dare you to move

I dare you to move

Like today never happened

Today never happened before

Today never happened

Today never happened before

**Prayer of Confession**

**Holy God, though we try in our lives, through our work, in church and in your world**

**to be your disciples, we do not always succeed and sometimes completely miss the**

**mark. Sometimes we focus our efforts in one place and forget or let go of other areas,**

**peoples, or communities just as important in your eyes. Forgive us we pray. Shake**

**loose the scales from our eyes to better see the world around us. In Jesus’ name and in**

**service to Christ we pray. Amen.**

**Assurance of Grace**

Let not your hearts be troubled, for you are doing great things. Continue on in your

service. Be aware of all to whom God calls us to serve. Rise, and know that you are loved,

forgiven, and endorsed by Christ to bring good news, light, and new life to all with whom you

meet. Thanks be to God!

**Offertory Call**

We live in abundance though not all of us may have what we want or need. God’s love is

abundant. Our welcome and affirmation to all is extravagant! Each of us has something to

share as a way of thanking our God for the opportunity to live and participate in creation. Let us

now give as we are able to give new life to the ministries of our church and to resurrect parts of

our community, nation, and world and set them on a course of hope for a new day. Our

morning offering will now be received.

**Blessing of Gifts**

Loving God, just as you raised Lazarus from the tomb, just as you amazed all who

witnessed the miracle of new life on that day, and just as you still amaze us with the miracles of

a newborn’s cry, epiphanies of new ways to see the world, and the resurrection of our spirits,

we give you thanks for the gifts we share now, the gifts of our labor, the gifts of our actions,

and the gifts of our words for you and for your world. In your many names we pray. Amen.

**Benediction**

I dare you to move, I dare you to move, I dare you to lift yourselves and the needs of our

neighborhoods, our nation, and yes even our world up and out from despair. I dare you to move

with the peace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prepared and presented by Rev. Dan Furman,

Pastor, Hudsonville Congregational United Church of Christ, Hudsonville, OH

**Passion/Palm Sunday Year A**

April 5, 2020

**Palm/Passion Sunday Service**

**From Palms to Passion:   
The Story of Jesus’ Last Days in Jerusalem**

**from Matthew’s Gospel**

**April 5, 2020**

*The story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and then of his passion — betrayal, arrest, torture and interrogation, and crucifixion as a criminal — form an essential part of the Christian story. Each of the gospel writers told that story with particular aims and individual messages. Yet for many worshipers, it is rare to hear the story in its entirety. This document is a script that presents the entire narrative. It expands on the traditional narratives of the Entry into Jerusalem, by continuing to recount Jesus’ entry into the Temple; it begins the Passion Narrative somewhat earlier than usual, with the Anointing at Bethany, and concludes after the burial with the posting of the guard at the tomb. These additions, to my mind, help to highlight Jesus’ ministry as a threat to religious authorities and the state, rather than focus on individual betrayals (although there is plenty of that!) Take and adapt as needed!*

*The worship script is designed to be delivered by three readers. Rather than assigning parts the three read lines in succession (with some alterations for dramatic effect). Each reader thus plays many roles, and the voices of narrator, Jesus, Peter, and so on, are shared. When any group speaks, whether a crowd of onlookers or the disciples, the congregation reads. Verses of hymns punctuate the story, providing a change of pace and delivering the message in a different mode.*

*The translation of scripture used below is from* ***The Inclusive Bible: The First******Egalitarian Translation****, translated by Priests for Equality, Copyright © 2009 Priests for Equality. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.*

*Congregations may wish to use the script in three ways. In the first, you may print the entire script in the bulletin, which sometimes has the disadvantages of requiring much paper and leading people to read more than listen — but could also raise the level of attention to the story. In the second, you may print only the congregational responses, with “lead-in” phrases, and the speaker could cue worshipers to speak their lines together. In the third, you may project the congregational responses, as well as hymn verses, on a large screen.*

*In this service,* ***Palms*** *are used in a slightly different way: after the parade early on, they are dropped on the floor to absorb the wear and tear of the rest of the service, and by extension, the betrayals, the shocks and the pain of the story. When they are collected at the end they will have lost their triumphant sheen. For Palms grown in sustainable conditions, check out Eco-Palms:* <https://ecopalms.org/>

**Words of Welcome**

**Call to Worship**

One: Lent began in the wilderness; it concludes in Jerusalem.

**All: We now come near to the end of one story. Another will soon begin.**

We have followed Jesus this far;

today we remember how he faced betrayal, falseness,

rejection, and torment.

**And we witness, once more, that he taught and walked in love   
through every step of the journey.**

**Matthew 21: 1-17**

**Jesus Enters Jerusalem and the Temple**

**Narrator (Reader 1)** As they approached Jerusalem, entering Beth-Phage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent off two disciples 2with the instructions,

**Jesus (Reader 2)** “Go into the village straight ahead of you, and immediately you will find a tethered donkey with her colt standing beside her. Untie them and lead them back to me. 3 If anyone questions you, say, ‘The Rabbi needs them.’ Then they will let them go at once.”

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 4This came about to fulfill what was said through the prophet: 5“Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Your Sovereign comes to you without display, riding on a donkey, on a colt— the foal of a beast of burden.’ ” 6So the disciples went off and did what Jesus had ordered. 7They brought the donkey and her colt, and after they laid their cloaks on the animals, Jesus mounted and rode toward the city.

**The Procession of Palms**

**Narrator (reader 1)** 8Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while some began to cut branches from the trees and lay them along the path. 9The crowds—those who went in front of Jesus and those who followed—were all shouting

**Crowd (Children) “Hosanna to the Heir to the House of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Most High! Hosanna in the highest!”**

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 10As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred to its depths, demanding, “Who is this?” 11And the crowd kept answering,

**Crowd (Congregation) “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee!”**

*Children and others in the congregation may parade around the sanctuary*

*singing and waving palms*

**Hymn Pave the Way with Branches** Sing! Prayer and Praise132

**Jesus is coming. Pave the way with branches.**

**Jesus is coming. Hosanna!**

***Chorus: Hosanna. Jesus is coming, Hosanna to the Prince of Peace.***

***Hosanna. Jesus is coming, Hosanna to the Prince of Peace.***

**Hope for the downtrod. Pave the way with branches.**

**Hope for the downtrod. Hosanna!**

**Land for the landless. Pave the way with branches.**

**Land for the landless. Hosanna!**

**Debts are forgiven. Pave the way with branches.**

**Debts are forgiven. Hosanna!**

**Release for the captives. Pave the way with branches.**

**Release for the captives. Hosanna!**

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*Permission given to congregations for one-time use.*

*At the conclusion of the procession, invite the congregation to throw their palms into the aisles. For the rest of the service, people will tread on the palms.*

**Jesus in the Temple**

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 12When Jesus entered the Temple, he drove out all those who were selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves. 13He said to them,

**Jesus (Reader 1)** “Scripture says, ‘My house is called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of thieves!”

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 14Those who were blind or couldn’t walk came to him in the Temple, and he healed them. 15When the chief priests and teachers of the Law saw the wonderful things Jesus did throughout the Temple area, especially when they heard the children shouting:

**Crowd (Children)** **“Hosanna to the Heir to the House of David!”**

**Narrator (Reader 3)** They asked him: 16“Do you hear what the children are shouting?”

**Jesus (Reader 3)** “Yes! Have you never read, ‘From the mouths of children and nursing babies, you have brought forth praise’?”

**Narrator (Reader 1)**  17After leaving them,

Jesus went out to Bethany to spend the night.

**Prayers of the People**

**Pastoral Prayer**

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Call for the Offering**

**Choral Affirmation**

**All Glory, Laud and Honor** verse 3 TNCH 216

**As you received their praises, receive our prayers today,**

**Whose justice and whose mercy and sovereignty hold sway.**

**All glory laud and honor to you O Christ we sing,**

**To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring!**

**Offertory Prayer** *unison*

**We cast these gifts before you, O God,**

**as palms were cast before Jesus long ago.**

**We lay them on your altar in praise, thanksgiving, and joy.**

**Receive them back from our hands,**

**that they may become a greater blessing in your hands.**

**In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

**The Passion According to St Matthew**

**Matthew 26 :1—28 :20**

**Conspiracy Against Jesus Begins**

**Narrator (Reader 1)** Jesus told the disciples, 2“Passover starts in two days, and the Chosen One will be handed over to be crucified.” 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas. 4They planned to arrest Jesus under some pretext and execute him— 5“But not during the Festival,” they agreed, “or we might have a riot on our hands.”

**Anointing At Bethany**

**Narrator (Reader 2**) 6Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the house of Simon, who had leprosy, 7a woman approached Jesus with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment. She poured it on his head while he reclined at the table. 8The disciples, witnessing this, were indignant.

**Disciples (Adults)** **“What a waste!” 9“This could have been sold at a high price, and the money given to needier people.”**

**Jesus (Reader 3)** 10Jesus, aware of their concern, said, “Why do you upset the woman? She has done me a good deed. 11You’ll always have poor people with you, but you won’t always have me. 12When she poured the oil on my body,

she was preparing me for burial. 13The truth is, wherever the Good News is proclaimed in the world, she will be remembered for what she has done for me.”

**Conspiracy Continues**

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 14One of the Twelve, the one named Judas Iscariot, went off to the chief priests 15and said, “What are you willing to give me if I hand Jesus over to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16And from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

**The Passover Meal**

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 17On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came up to Jesus and said, “Where do you want us to prepare the Passover for you?” 18Jesus told them to go to a certain person in the city and say,

**Jesus (Reader 3)** “The Teacher says, ‘My appointed time draws near. I am to celebrate the Passover in your house.’”

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 19The disciples did as Jesus ordered and prepared the Passover supper. 20When it grew dark, he reclined at table with the Twelve. 21And while they were eating he said,

**Jesus (Reader 2)** “The truth is, one of you is about to betray me.”

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 22They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, “Surely, it is not I, Teacher?” 23Jesus replied,

**Jesus (Reader 1)** “The one who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will hand me over. 24The Chosen One will go as the scriptures foretold—but woe to the one by whom the Chosen One is betrayed! It would be better for that one never to have been born at all.”

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 25Then Judas, who was betraying Jesus, said,

“Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” Jesus answered,

**Jesus (Reader 3)** “You have said it yourself.”

**Holy Communion?**

*Possibly incorporate the Lord’s Supper here?*

*Pastor or presider leads the ritual. As people walk forward to receive communion, they step on the palms.*

*Suggested Communion Song:* ***Come to the Table of Grace***

*Sing! Prayer and Praise 112*

*If no Communion, continue with the reading.*

26During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the disciples. “Take this and eat it,” Jesus said. “This is my body.” 27Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them. “Drink from it, all of you,” he said. 28 “This is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which will be poured out on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. 29The truth is, I will not drink this fruit of the vine again until the day when I drink it anew with you in my Abba’s kindom.”

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 30Then, after singing a hymn, they walked out to the Mount of Olives.

**Hymn Journey to Gethsemane** *verse 1*

**Journey to Gethsemane,**

**Go and feel the tempter’s power;**

**Your redeemer’s conflict see;**

**Watch the anguish of this hour;**

**Do not hide or turn away;**

**Learn from Jesus how to pray.**

**Peter Tries to Promise Faithfulness**

**Jesus (Reader 2)** 31Jesus then said to them, “Tonight you will all fall away because of me, for scripture says, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ 32But after I have been raised, I will go to Galilee ahead of you.”

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 33Peter responded, “Though all may fall away because of you, I never will!” 34Jesus replied,

**Jesus (Reader 1)** “The truth is, before the cock crows tonight, you will deny me three times.”

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 35Peter said, “Even if I must die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

36Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane and said to the disciples,

**Jesus Prays, and the Disciples Sleep**

**Jesus (Reader 3)** “Stay here while I go over there and pray.”

37Jesus took along Peter, James and John and started to feel grief and anguish. 38Then he said to them,

**Jesus (Reader 1)** “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death. Please, stay here, and stay awake with me.” 39Jesus went on a little further and fell prostrate in prayer: “Abba, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. But not what

I want—what you want.”

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 40When Jesus returned to the disciples, he found them asleep. He said to Peter,

**Jesus (Reader 3)** “Couldn’t you stay awake with me for even an hour?

41Be on guard, and pray that you may not undergo trial. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” 42Withdrawing a second time, Jesus prayed, “Abba, if this cup cannot pass me by without my drinking it, your will be done!”

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 43Once more Jesus returned and found the disciples asleep; they could not keep their eyes open. 44Jesus left them again, withdrew somewhat and prayed for a third time, saying the same words as before. 45Finally Jesus returned to the disciples and said to them,

**Jesus (Reader 2)** “Are you still sleeping? Still taking your rest? The hour is upon us—the Chosen One is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46Get up! Let us be on our way! Look, my betrayer is here.”

**Betrayal and Arrest**

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 47While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived—accompanied by a great crowd with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. 48Judas had arranged to give them a signal. “Whomever I embrace is the one,” he had said; “take hold of him.” 49He immediately went over to Jesus and said, “Shalom, Rabbi!” and embraced him. 50Jesus said to Judas,

**Jesus (Reader 1)** “Friend, just do what you’re here to do!”

**Narrator (Reader 2)** At that moment, the crowd surrounded them, laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. 51Suddenly, one of those who accompanied Jesus drew a sword and slashed at the high priest’s attendant, cutting off an ear.

52 Jesus said,

**Jesus (Reader 3)** “Put your sword back where it belongs. Those who live by the sword die by the sword. 53Don’t you think I can call on my Abba God to provide over twelve legions of angels at a moment’s notice? 54But then how would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen this way?” Am I a robber, that you have come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Every day I sat teaching in the Temple precincts, yet you never arrested me.”

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 56All this happened in fulfillment of the writings of the prophets. Then all the disciples deserted Jesus and fled.

**Jesus before Caiaphas**

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 57Those who had seized Jesus led him off to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the religious scholars and elders had convened. 58 Peter followed at a distance as far as the high priest’s residence. Going inside, Peter sat down with the guards to await the outcome. 59The chief priests, with the whole Sanhedrin, were busy trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. 60 They discovered none, despite the many false witnesses who took the stand.

**Narrator (Reader 3)** Finally two came forward 61who stated, “This man has declared, ‘I can destroy God’s sanctuary and rebuild it in three days.” 62The high priest rose and addressed Jesus, “Have you no answer? What about this testimony leveled against you?” 63But Jesus remained silent. The high priest then said to him, “I order you to tell us under oath, before the living God, whether or not you are the Messiah, the Firstborn of God?” Jesus replied,

**Jesus (Reader 1)** 64“You have said it yourself. But I tell you: soon you will see the Chosen One seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 65At this, the high priest tore his robes and said, “Blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? You yourselves have heard the blasphemy. 66What is your verdict?” They responded, “He deserves death!” 67Then they spat at his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped Jesus, 68saying, “Play the prophet for us, Messiah! Who struck you?”

**Peter Denies Jesus**

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 69While this was happening, Peter was sitting in the courtyard. One of the attendants came over and said, “You were with Jesus the Galilean too, weren’t you?” 70But Peter denied it in front of everyone. He said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” 71When Peter went out to the gate, another attendant saw him and said to those nearby, “This one was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72Again he cursed and denied it: “I don’t know him!”

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 73A little while later, some bystanders came over to Peter and said, “You certainly are one of them! Even your accent gives you away!” 74At that, Peter began cursing and swore, “I don’t know the man!” Just then a rooster began to crow, 75and Peter remembered the prediction Jesus had made: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” Peter went out and cried bitterly.

**Jesus Sent to Pilate; Judas Despairs**

**Narrator (Reader 2) 27:** 1At daybreak, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took formal action against Jesus to put him to death. 2 They bound him and led him away to be handed over to Pilate, the governor.

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 3When he saw that Jesus had been condemned, Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, felt remorse. He took the thirty pieces of silver back to the chief priests and elders, 4and said, “I have sinned! I have betrayed innocent blood!” “What’s that to us?” they answered. “That’s your affair!” 5So Judas flung the money into the sanctuary and left. Then he went off and hanged himself. 6The chief priests picked up the silver, observing, “ It’s against the Law to deposit this in the Temple treasury, since it is blood money.” 7After some discussion, they used the money to buy Potter’s Field as a cemetery for foreigners. 8 That is why that field, even today, is called Blood Field. …

**Hymn Journey to Gethsemane** *verse 2 TNCH 219*

**Follow then to Pilate’s hall,**

**View the Lord of life arraigned;**

**Crowned with thorns and mocked by all,**

**Faithfully this pain sustained.**

**Greater still than shame, or loss;**

**Jesus now must face the cross.**

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 11 Then Jesus was arraigned before Pontius Pilate, the governor, who questioned him. “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus replied,

**Jesus (Reader 2)** “You say that I am.”

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 12Yet when Jesus was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no reply. 13Pilate said to Jesus, “Surely you hear how many charges they bring against you?” 14But Jesus did not answer Pilate on a single count, much to the governor’s surprise.

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 15Now, on the occasion of a festival, the governor was accustomed to release one prisoner, whomever the crowd would designate.

16At the time they were holding a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. 17So when the crowd gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you wish me to release for you? Barabbas? Or Jesus, the so-called Messiah?” 18Pilate knew, of course, that it was out of jealousy that they had handed Jesus over. 19While Pilate was still presiding on the bench, his wife sent him a message:

**Pilate’s Wife (Reader 2)** “Have nothing to do with that innocent man. I had a dream about him last night which has been troubling me all day long.”

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 20But the chief priests and elders convinced the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and have Jesus put to death. 21 So when the governor asked them, “Which one do you wish me to release for you?” they all cried,

**Crowd “Barabbas!”**

**Pilate (Reader 3)** 22Pilate said to them, “Then what am I to do with Jesus, the so-called Messiah?”

**Crowd “Crucify him!”**

**Pilate (Reader 1)** 23 “Why? What crime has he committed?” Pilate asked. But they only shouted louder,

**Crowd “Crucify him!”**

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 24Pilate finally realized that he was getting nowhere with this—in fact, a riot was breaking out. Pilate called for water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, declaring as he did so, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. The responsibility is yours.”

25 The whole crowd said in reply, “Let his blood be on us and on our children.” (needs context! see resources at the end of the service) \*

26At that, Pilate released Barabbas to them.

**Jesus Humiliated, and taken to the Place of Crucifixion**

**Narrator (Reader 3)** Pilate had Jesus whipped with a cat-o’-nine-tails, then handed him over to be crucified.

27 The governor’s soldiers took Jesus inside the Praetorium and assembled the whole cohort around him. 28They stripped off his clothes and wrapped him in a scarlet military cloak. 29 Weaving a crown out of thorns, they pressed it onto his head and stuck a reed in his right hand. Then they began to mock Jesus by dropping to their knees, saying, “All hail, King of the Jews!” 30 They also spat at him. Afterward they took hold of the reed and struck Jesus on the head.

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 1Finally, when they had finished mocking him, they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes and led him off to crucifixion. 32On their way out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon, whom they pressed into service to carry the cross. 33 Upon arriving at a site called Golgotha—which means Skull Place— 34they gave Jesus a drink of wine mixed with a narcotic herb, which Jesus tasted but refused to drink. 35Once they had nailed Jesus to the cross, they divided his clothes among them by rolling dice;

36 then they sat down and kept watch over him. 37Above his head, they put the charge against him in writing: “This is Jesus, King of the Jews.”

**The Cross**

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 38Two robbers were crucified along with Jesus, one at his right and one at his left. 39People going by insulted Jesus, shaking their heads 40and saying,

**Crowd “So you are the one who was going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Save yourself, why don’t you? Come down off that cross if you are God’s Own!”**

41The religious authorities also joined in the jeering:

**Crowd****42“He saved others but he cannot save himself!**

**So he’s the King of Israel!**

**Let’s see him come down from that cross, and then we will believe in him.**

**43 He trusts in God; let God rescue him now!**

**after all, he claimed to be God’s Own!”**

44The robbers who had been crucified with Jesus jeered at him in the same way.

**Jesus Dies**

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 45At noon, a darkness fell over the whole land until about three in the afternoon. 46At that hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice,

**Jesus (Reader 1)** “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani ?” which means, “ My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

**Narrator (Reader 2**) 47This made some of the bystanders who heard it remark, “He is calling for Elijah!” 48One of them hurried off and got a sponge. He soaked the sponge in cheap wine and, sticking it on a reed, tried to make Jesus drink. 49 The others said, “Leave him alone. Let’s see whether Elijah comes to his rescue.”

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 50 Once again, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, then he gave up his spirit.

*Congregations hearing the Passion read traditionally pause here*

*in silent prayer*

**Hymn What Wondrous Love is This?** *Verse 1*TNCH 223

**What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!**

**What wondrous love is this, O my soul!**

**What wondrous love is this that Christ should come in bliss**

**to bear the heavy cross for my soul, for my soul,**

**to bear the heavy cross, for my soul!**

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 51Suddenly, the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies was ripped in half from top to bottom. The earth quaked, boulders were split 52 and tombs were opened. Many bodies of holy ones who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 After Jesus’ resurrection, they came out of their tombs and entered the holy city, and appeared to many.

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 54 The centurion and his cohort, who were standing guard over Jesus’ body, were terror-stricken at seeing the earthquake and all that was happening, and said, “Clearly, this was God’s own!”

**Narrator (Reader 3)** 55A group of women were present, looking on from a distance. These were the same women who had followed Jesus from Galilee as ministers to him. 56 Among them were Mary of Magdala; Mary, the mother of James and Joseph; and the mother of Zebedee’s children.

**Burial**

**Narrator (Reader 1)** 57When evening fell, a wealthy man from Arimathea named Joseph, who had become a disciple of Jesus, 58came to request the body of Jesus; Pilate issued an order for its release. 59Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in fresh linen 60and laid it in his own tomb, which had been hewn out of rock. Then Joseph rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away.

61But Mary of Magdala and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb.

**A Roman Guard Posted**

**Narrator (Reader 2)** 62The next day—the one following the day of Preparation—the chief priests and the Pharisees called at Pilate’s residence

63 and said, “We recall that, while he was still alive, the impostor made the claim, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64Therefore, please issue an order to keep the tomb under surveillance until the third day. Otherwise, Jesus’ disciples might go and steal his body and tell the people, ‘Jesus has been raised from the dead!’ This final deception would be worse than the first.” 65Pilate said to them, “You have a guard. Go and secure the tomb as best you can.” 66So they went to seal the tomb and post a guard.

***The congregation reflects in silence.***

**Closing Music**

***As the congregation leaves the worship space, they are invited to take a palm from the floor—invested now not only with the memory of the triumphal entrance, but with the whole story of the passion of Jesus***.

**From Palms to Passion: The Story of Jesus’ Last Days in Jerusalem for Palm/Passion Sunday** was written by the Rev. John A. Nelson for Year C, and adapted for Year A by the Rev. Susan Blain.



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International Council of Christians and Jews: **Matthew’s Gospel and Judaism**, by Dorothy Lee

<http://www.jcrelations.net/Matthew's+Gospel+and+Judaism.2201.0.html?L=3>

**The Jewish Annotated New Testament** **(NRSV);** Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds

© 2011 Oxford University Press. *Verse by verse notes on Matthew 26-27 begin on page 47*

**Preaching God’s Transforming Justice Year A**; Ottoni-Wilhelm, Allen and Andres, eds; © 2013 Westminster John Knox Press. *Note*

**Psalm 31:9-16 NRSV**  
Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;

my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.  
For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;

my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.  
I am the scorn of all my adversaries,

a horror to my neighbors,

an object of dread to my acquaintances;

those who see me in the street flee from me.  
I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;

I have become like a broken vessel.  
For I hear the whispering of many-- terror all around!—

as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.  
But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."  
My times are in your hand;

deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.  
Let your face shine upon your servant;

save me in your steadfast love.

Psalm 31:9-18 The Message (MSG)

Be kind to me, God—  
    I’m in deep, deep trouble again.  
I’ve cried my eyes out;  
    I feel hollow inside.  
My life leaks away, groan by groan;  
    my years fade out in sighs.  
My troubles have worn me out,  
    turned my bones to powder.  
To my enemies I’m a monster;  
    I’m ridiculed by the neighbors.  
My friends are horrified;  
    they cross the street to avoid me.  
They want to blot me from memory,  
    forget me like a corpse in a grave,  
    discard me like a broken dish in the trash.  
The street-talk gossip has me  
    “criminally insane”!  
Behind locked doors they plot  
    how to ruin me for good.

**14-18**Desperate, I throw myself on you:  
    *you* are my God!  
Hour by hour I place my days in your hand,  
    safe from the hands out to get me.  
Warm me, your servant, with a smile;  
    save me because you love me.

**Psalm 31: 9-16 CEB**

**9**Have mercy on me, Lord, because I’m depressed.  
    My vision fails because of my grief,  
    as do my spirit and my body.  
**10**My life is consumed with sadness;  
    my years are consumed with groaning.  
Strength fails me because of my suffering;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+31%3A+9-16&version=CEB#fen-CEB-14342a)]  
    my bones dry up.  
**11**I’m a joke to all my enemies,  
    still worse to my neighbors.  
    I scare my friends,  
    and whoever sees me in the street runs away!  
**12**I am forgotten, like I’m dead,  
    completely out of mind;  
    I am like a piece of pottery, destroyed.  
**13**Yes, I’ve heard all the gossiping,  
    terror all around;  
    so many gang up together against me,  
        they plan to take my life!

**14**But me? I trust you, Lord!  
    I affirm, “You are my God.”  
**15**My future is in your hands.  
    Don’t hand me over to my enemies,  
    to all who are out to get me!  
**16**Shine your face on your servant;  
    save me by your faithful love!

**Psalm 31: 9-16 NABRE**

Psalm 31:9-16 New American Bible (Revised Edition) (NABRE)

**9**You will not abandon me into enemy hands,  
    but will set my feet in a free and open space.

**10**Be gracious to me, Lord, for I am in distress;  
    affliction is wearing down my eyes,  
    my throat and my insides.  
**11**My life is worn out by sorrow,  
    and my years by sighing.  
My strength fails in my affliction;  
    my bones are wearing down.  
**12**To all my foes I am a thing of scorn,  
    and especially to my neighbors  
    a horror to my friends.  
When they see me in public,  
    they quickly shy away.  
**13**I am forgotten, out of mind like the dead;  
    I am like a worn-out tool.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+31%3A+9-16&version=NABRE#fen-NABRE-16425a)]  
**14**I hear the whispers of the crowd;  
    terrors are all around me.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+31%3A+9-16&version=NABRE#fen-NABRE-16426b)]  
They conspire together against me;  
    they plot to take my life.  
**15**But I trust in you, Lord;  
    I say, “You are my God.”  
**16**My destiny is in your hands;  
    rescue me from my enemies,  
    from the hands of my pursuers.

**Psalm 31: 9-16 ICEL**

You let no enemy cage me,

But set my feet on open ground.

Pity me, Lord,   
I hurt all over;

My eyes are swollen,

my heart and body ache.

Grief consumes my life,

Sighs fill all my days;

Guilt saps my strength,

My bones dissolve.

Enemies mock me,

make me the butt of jokes.

Neighbors scorn me,

strangers avoid me.

Forgotten like the dead,

I am a shattered jar.

I hear the crowd whisper,

“Attack on every side!”

As they scheme to take my life.

But I trust in you, Lord.

I say, “You are my God,

My life is in your hands.”

Snatch me from the enemy,

Ruthless in their chase.

Look on me with love,

Save your servant;

I call on you;

Save me from shame!

**Commentary on Psalm 31:9-16 from Working Preacher**

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=273>

[**Nancy Koester**](http://www.workingpreacher.org/profile/default.aspx?uid=nkoester) | [**0 Comments**](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=273#post_comments)

The Psalms enrich preaching during Holy Week and Easter, even if few preachers base an entire sermon on the Psalms.

Jesus prayed the Psalms from the cross, and the Gospels quote the Psalms to tell of Jesus' passion. Strong liturgical traditions invoke the Psalms during Holy Week and Easter. Most important, at a season when Jesus' humanity is so fully revealed, the Psalms show what it means to be a human being before God. No book of the Bible is more forthright about human experience, and none more militantly declares God's faithfulness, even when God seems absent. There is every reason for preachers to mine the Psalms in Holy Week and Easter, as preachers have done from the beginning of the Christian story.

If your congregation uses this Sunday as Palm Sunday; celebrating Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem; you'll do well to bypass the lectionary Psalm, and use Psalm 24 instead. "Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in." (24:7). This Psalm is fit for a king to enter a city. George Frederick Handel thought so too, for this is the text he set to music in his *Messiah* to evoke Jesus' entry into Jerusalem before his passion.

But if your congregation observes this day as the Sunday of the Passion, Psalm 31 does important business.

First, it shows human suffering in the most graphic terms. If an aim of worship on this day is to ponder Jesus' passion, Psalm 31 goes there. Second, Psalm 31 proclaims God's faithfulness. By quoting this Psalm, Jesus expressed his trust in God; even when God did not deliver him from crucifixion.

In Luke's version of the passion (23:46), Jesus died praying Psalm 31:5: "Father, 'Into your hand I commit my spirit.'" But Luke did not quote the next line, "you have redeemed me, Oh Lord, faithful God." Perhaps the implication is that Jesus committed his spirit into God's hands, *no matter what*. Jesus never stopped trusting God even when he felt abandoned.

It could be that Jesus prayed the whole Psalm from the cross,1  writes biblical scholar James Limburg. Of course, there is no way to know for sure. But we may faithfully imagine Psalm 31 in the broader context of Holy Week.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem toward his death, yet the people treated him like a conquering hero. They threw down their garments for him to ride over; they waved palm branches and roared their approval rating. But as Jesus moved *through* the crowd, he was not moved by their expectations of him. His one desire was to remain faithful to God's will.

Later that week Jesus prayed that God might 'remove this cup' of suffering, then he committed himself to accept God's will. Psalm 31offers a similar prayer: "Take me out of the net that is hidden for me." But even so, "into your hand I commit my Spirit" (31:4, 5).

The image of the hand is important in Psalm 31 (verse 5, 8, 15). According to the *New Interpreter's Bible*, "hand" means "grasp" or "power." The psalmist declares that God's hand upholds him.2  First comes the prayer: "Into your hand I commit my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God" (31:5). Then comes the statement: "you...have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy, you have set my feet in a broad place" (31:8). And later, despite great suffering, the Psalmist affirms, "my times are in your hand," and continues to pray for deliverance from "the hand of my enemies and persecutors."

Jesus knew that even when he was literally in the clutches of his foes, they could never grasp or possess him. They might seize him, but they could not hold him. He knew that he was not "in the hand of the enemy" (31:8) but in the "hand" of God (31:5, 15).

Central to this Psalm is the confession of trust in God. Preachers call their hearers to look upon Jesus' suffering through the eyes of faith. Psalm 31:9-13 can be used to help people picture Jesus on the cross. Here we see "an object of dread," "horror," and "scorn." There is no hope of rescue, for Jesus has "passed out of mind like one who is dead" (31:12). His body is broken like a smashed vessel, his eye wasted from grief. Strength fails and bones waste away. Around his broken body, betrayal is in the air, so thick you can smell it. Enemies sneer and snicker, neighbors flee in terror. The soundtrack for Jesus' death is mockery and hissing.

No voice of consolation comes from the bystanders. But if Jesus had prayed this entire Psalm, there would be inner consolation: "I trust in you, O LORD, I say, 'You are my God,' my times are in my hand" (31:14-15).

Yet the Psalm is anything but serene. It is not the prayer of one who gives up and welcomes death, but a plea for deliverance "from the hand of my enemies and persecutors" (verse 15). So too Jesus prayed, "remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36). Psalm 31 can be used to help people imagine Jesus' struggle: first to continue living, and then, while dying, to keep on trusting God. It was a battle all the way.

The Psalmist felt separated from God: "I had said in my alarm, 'I am driven far from your sight'" (31:22). So too Jesus felt abandoned as he cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34, quoting Psalm 22:1). Jesus had no advocate; no voice but the Psalms. It seems fitting, then, that preachers listen to these Psalms for the echo of Jesus' voice.

That voice will resound at Easter, in a different key: trust in God is vindicated by resurrection from the dead. Psalm 31 points toward this hope. It ends with a word of encouragement: "Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all who wait for the LORD" (31:24). It takes courage to follow Jesus through Holy Week. The spectacle of his passion is not for the faint of heart, for to watch Jesus die is to face our own death too. Only by faith can we say, "I trust in you, O Lord... 'you are my God,' my times are in your hand" (31:14-15).

1James Limburg, *Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 102.  
2*New Interpreters' Bible* volume VI (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 801.

Prepared and presented by Rev. Susan Blain,

Minister for Worship and Gospel Arts, United Church of Christ National Setting

**Ideas for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Worship Experiences**

April 9 and 10, 2020

This section of the presentation will be an interactive brainstorming session facilitated by Rev. Justo Gonzalez, Interim Conference Minister, Illinois Conference UCC. We invite you to add your own thoughts and ideas.

**Easter Sunday Year A**

April 12, 2020

**Scripture:**

Matthew 28: 11-54

**Call To Worship:**

Easter Morning One: This is a new day! A day of marvels and miracles! A day to rejoice in what God has done! Yesterday was filled with too many worries and too little faith.

Many: On this Easter morning, we hear the old folks saying, “Mary, don’t you weep!”

One: This is a new day! A day of marvels and miracles! A day to rejoice in what God has done! Yesterday was filled with too much criticism and too little affirmation.

Many: Today, Martha, don’t you moan!

One: This is a new day! A day of marvels and miracles! A day to rejoice in what God has done! Yesterday was filled with too many questions and too few answers.

ALL: This is Easter morning; dry your tears and shout for joy! Jesus is not dead. He is alive! God has conquered death and Jesus has canceled sin. This is, indeed, a new day! Leap for joy!

**Gathering Prayer:**

Up from the place of shadow and ambiguity Up from the place of cooling corpses, rotting flesh, and bleached bones Up from the place of hopelessness and despair Jesus rose. We rise.

People of God, hear the resurrection call from shadow to sunrise, from chaos to clarity, from death to life. Christ is raised And we are raised in him!

**Prayer of Reconciliation:**

Gracious God of all,

So many of us come this morning

Bowed down with the weight of the world on our shoulders.

And heavily burdened with our own problems

And the problems of the world that we just can’t seem to solve.

Anxiety and pain, distrust and disease, racism, classism, and sexism

separate us from one another and from you. Help us find our way back to

you.

*Silence*

Remind us, O God, that your prayer is for us to become one—

to share each other’s hopes and burdens, sorrows and joys and

to create a world where resources are shared

so that all have enough for a full fruitful and blessed life.

Transform our separate lives into one communal life shared in and with

you; take away the armor that shields us from the pain and cries of

others and fill us with that indescribable joy that radiates from our

innermost being. In the majestic and joyful spirit of Jesus Christ we

pray and so it is with one voice that we all say, **Amen.**

**Assurance of Blessing**

Be joyful this day for you are not the burdens and sorrows you carry!

You are a child of the most High God, you are the beautiful and

marvelous image God created and is creating you to be! And God is

making of us the Beloved Community!

**Call to Offering**

What a blessing it is to give and receive, to share and support,

God provides us with all of these opportunities to share and to show

love, mercy, justice, and compassion. Let us give gifts that says yes to

our values as the Beloved Community of God!

**Offering Dedication**

**All:** Lord, we thank you for these gifts which we have freely given and gratefully received. We bless them and say yes to the values of our faith and dedicate these gifts to you as we continue to build with you the Kin-dom of love. **Amen**

**Sending/Benediction:**

We leave this place, this day to share the Good News of Jesus’ Resurrection! Death couldn’t keep him, the grave couldn’t hold him, He Got Up! Let your faith be contagious, courageous, and bold go tell a dying world that Jesus is Risen! He Got Up! Peace be with you.

**Sermon Themes:**

**A:** Anger, fear, betrayal, (Crucifixion, Roman authorities, Jesus dying)

**B:** Sadness, fear, wonder (no body in the tomb, Angels speaking, hearing the Angels)

**C:** Wonder, joy, celebration (seeing and hearing Jesus, women proclaiming the Good News of Resurrection, a new beginning)

**Possible Music Selections**

He Lives

I know that My Redeemer Liveth

Because He Lives

Christ The Lord Is Risen Today

My Lord, What A Morning

Soon Ah Will Be Done

God So Loved The World

**Resources Used**

Bridgeman Davis, Valerie and Safiyah Fosina, eds., The Africana Worship Book, Year C, Nashville, TN

UCC Worship Resources Starting Here, Starting Now, Sunday May 13, 2018, Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel Conference Minister, Missouri Mid-South Conference

Prepared and presented by Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers,

Retired Associate Conference Minister, Illinois Conference UCC