**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

## Sunday, April 9, 2017, the Fifth Sunday in Lent

**Call to Worship (see bulletin)**

**Prayer of the Day**

You are the one we have been waiting for, Mighty Lord!

You are the King of King,

The One whose coming promises Peace,

Who gives us Hope.

We are afraid of more disappointments, Lord.

Release us that we can trust your promises,

Leaning into your plans and preparations that shall win over our hearts

And triumph over darkness. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession (see bulletin)**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, Believe the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Responsive Reading Philippians 2:5-11 (see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Lord, you have a stony road to tread from here to Jerusalem. Thank you for taking the journey to the cross on our behalf, for showing us the way to live truly and eternally in our light.

You made yourself humble, to show us how we too best live humbly. We don’t have to be big and powerful in order to follow you. But we need your help along this path.

Help us in our times of weakness, that we find in ourselves your spiritual strength.

Make us your vessels of grace and hope, so we can bear for the world your presence of love.

We lift on high our prayers this day:

For the people of Syria – for the families who have suffered for so long.

For refugees who are everywhere in the world, seeking freedom from oppression.

For persons who suffer from abuse or neglect

Persons who suffer at the hands of those who should love them.

For persons who suffer from addictions and or mental illness.

On this Palm Sunday it is with mixed emotions we wave the palms of your victory, O God.

For we trust your plan to prove your power over evil but we await your ultimate healing.

Train our hearts to take hold of hope today and find hope in loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. In silence, we lift our prayers to you:

Cultivate in us a new strength and power that only your Holy Spirit can give, that our waving palms shall surely proclaim your Lordship, and that our lives may truly be the vessels of your presence as sure as you rode into Jerusalem triumphant. You taught us to pray with the boldness of the children of God by saying, “Our Father, who art in heaven… Amen.”

**Time Out for Teaching: Language of Lent – Kingship**

As our prayer of confession reminds us today, we think we can see through all the excitement of Palm Sunday because we know that after this comes the darkness of Good Friday, the emptiness of Holy Saturday before the glory of Easter.

But let’s sit for a moment with this day, Palm Sunday, and think on the details of the story of Jesus, riding in on a donkey, into the large city of Jerusalem.

What do you imagine the onlookers must have been thinking?

And that begs the question – what impression do you think this gave them of Jesus is?

-Jewish

-Messianic

-a prophet

-humble

Spreading garments on the ground, palms waving, riding on a donkey… these were all signs that the King has arrived, in the traditions familiar to Jews.

The city is wondering, “Who is this?” and Jesus’ little band of followers must inform others who he is. But their answer is not the full and complete answer. They tell the onlookers that he is “Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet.” While this is true, it is not all of who Jesus is. The reason he is riding in on a donkey is a ride of victory, believe it or not, but a humble victory. The prophet Zechariah told us that the Messiah’s animal is a donkey. Maybe that’s why when they are told, “The Lord needs this” the person was glad to oblige.

**Isaiah 50:4-9a**

4   The Lord GOD has given me
          the tongue of a teacher,
     that I may know how to sustain
          the weary with a word.
     Morning by morning he wakens —
          wakens my ear
          to listen as those who are taught.
5   The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
          and I was not rebellious,
          I did not turn backward.
6   I gave my back to those who struck me,
          and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
     I did not hide my face
          from insult and spitting.

7   The Lord GOD helps me;
          therefore I have not been disgraced;
     therefore I have set my face like flint,
          and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
8        he who vindicates me is near.
     Who will contend with me?
          Let us stand up together.
     Who are my adversaries?
          Let them confront me.
9   It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
          who will declare me guilty?

**Matthew 21:1-11**

1When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” 4This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,
5   “Tell the daughter of Zion,
     Look, your king is coming to you,
          humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
6The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,
     “Hosanna to the Son of David!
          Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
     Hosanna in the highest heaven!”
10When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” 11The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**Sermon: “This Strange Parade”**

Jerusalem was a large city. The Roman historian Tacitus estimated that there were about 600,000 persons in Jerusalem in the year 70. The Jewish historian Josephus estimated 1 million were killed in the Roman invasion of that same year. In any case, we know there were lots of people living there when Jesus came in on a donkey just 40 years earlier. A strange little parade into a large city. Those “crowds” shouting around him were probably the people who had been following him on the road, who had witnessed his healings and teachings and decided he was a prophet. The crowd there also probably brought along friends and relatives for this demonstration. And some of the crowds were likely people who really didn’t know what was going on, but who were swept up in the moment.

Matthew says the “whole city was in turmoil, asking ‘Who is this?’” It might be hard for you and I to imagine 600,000 people asking that question, at the very moment of this parade. Surely the onlookers were asking it, wondering who this Galilean man on a donkey-a common pack animal-receiving praise and palms waving as he entered the city in triumph. They would have recognized the imagery of a conquering king: palms were common symbols used by conquering kings to show they had won the battle and were taking a territory. Kings and generals, however, rode in on majestic horses and chariots, not donkeys! Those Jews well-versed in the prophets might have recognized the donkey as the Messiah’s animal. Few people recognized Jesus. They had to be told who he was.

It was a strange parade.

Parades are odd things. The day that my maternal grandmother died, I was at a parade. It was a strange parade too. My parents were visiting me in Albuquerque. As we were hanging out in a corner coffeeshop in Old Town, we noticed some people gathering along the street, and further down the road were trailers dressed up as parade floats. We did a mental checklist – no, it’s not a holiday – what’s going on? No special day to celebrate, no heroes come home from war, just a day for the neighborhood to come out, enjoy some music, catch candy from tossed from the floats, and see the local businesses represented. One that stands out in particular in my memory was a belly dancing float! It was a strange parade. After the parade, feeling a little lift in our hearts for the spontaneity of it all, my mother received a phone call that her mom had died. All we could think was, maybe she was actually with us at that parade. She would have been there, if she could.

Parades are pushy – they push joy and fun right in our faces. There are few sad parades – just funeral processions. Parades are happy, whether you are happy or sad, worrying about the future, angry with your neighbor, whatever you may be feeling at the time, even if your day is going badly, you’re forced to reckon with all that gaiety. Even as Jesus rode in on his humble donkey, practically unknown in Jerusalem, - He knew what was to happen to him in just a few days’ time. He knew there were certain persons prepared to betray him, and still others who were looking for the chance to get rid of him.

This strange parade – a day of rejoicing that soon turns into an execution walk – forces us to reckon with our own walks with God. Jesus asked his disciples: “Are you willing to drink from the cup that I drink and be baptized with the same baptism with which I am baptized?” That’s a question for us all – to reckon with all the rejoicing and the humility of knowing the King has come near. For knowing the King has come near to us, we shall feel both joyful and humble. Are we ready to walk the walk? To serve as the Son of Man serves? This strange parade is made stranger that we live in the light of hope, while feeling the pain that life hands us. The good news is, Jesus has already walked this road, walks it with us. Amen.

**Announcements:**

We continue our journey through the Gospel of Mark this Friday at 5:30PM in the Fellowship Hall. Warm bread and wholesome, homemade soup is for dinner!

Make plans to come to a Maundy Thursday service on Thursday, April 13th. There will be a service of communion by intinction, as we did last year.

Calling all musicians! Amy is looking for a couple of voices or bell ringers to play special music on Easter Sunday. We will be creative this year, as the illustrious Nancy Mueller is out of town for Easter this year.