**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, April 14, 2019, Palm-Passion Sunday**

**Litany for Palm Sunday excerpted from Psalm 118 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayer of the Day**

We praise you, Almighty Messiah,

King of David.

Save your people, we pray,

From our many mistakes.

Save your world,

When things seem to go horribly wrong.

We thank you, God,

For your steadfast love endures forever.

Just as you came into the city of Jerusalem where you were not welcome,

So also re-enter our world of mistakes and as a good king

Help us when we cannot help ourselves.

For it all belongs to you, O Lord, including our very own hearts.

Amen.

**Call to Confession**

It is necessary for us to speak to God from the heart. Because God is Lord of all Creation, we already belong to Him, as the Book of Confessions (a Brief Statement of Faith) say, “In life and in death, we belong to God.” Therefore, let us talk to God together how we may have missed the mark, failed to live up to our potential as His people. First together and then in silence.

**Prayer of Confession (please see bulletin)**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Hear the Good News! In life and in death, we belong to God. God loves us even when we have made mistakes and calls us to turn back toward His love.

Friends, Believe the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Pastoral Prayer**

Our palms are waving, our voices singing, even a donkey marching down the aisle, all of these things to reenact your entry into that dangerous and unwelcome city of Jerusalem. You came, O Lord, to declare to those who believed, that the Messiah had come. And so soon after, you were rejected, even some of those who were closest to you.

Even though you have forgiven our tenuous, conditional love, we keep on with our ways. Help us in our unbelief and strengthen us as your people.

We are your remnant of believers in a world that seems to have already abandoned you. Embolden us in our proclamation, spark our imaginations, so that those who seek you may soon recognize your living presence in this church and in their hearts.

Ride into our streets and common spaces, that your healing be known.

Ride into hospital, psychiatric wards, pharmacies and dialysis units.

Ride into rehabs and under bridges.

Into daycare centers. Into our schools.

Into the hearts of those contemplating violence.

Into the hearts of politicians.

Into our small businesses

Into our kitchens and backyards.

Into foreign nations where people are living in terror and hunger.

When we reenact your entry into the dangerous and unwelcome city,

Help us to remember this is a day for everyone

To remember you are the Lord of all creation,

Come to save.

Help us to live into this knowledge and trust your vision for a saved world,

As we care for those who need your help:

Richard

Michelle

Lynn and her daughter

Glenda

Vicky

…

In silence we lift up our prayers.

This we pray as Jesus first taught his disciples to pray, “Our Father…Amen.”

**Isaiah 50:4-9a**

4The 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. 5The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. 6I 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. 7The 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; 8he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

**Luke 19:28-40**

28After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

29When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it'" 32So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34They said, "The Lord needs it." 35Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38saying,

"Blessed is the king

who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,

and glory in the highest heaven!"

39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." 40He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

**Time out for Teaching: Good Stewards**

 Today is Palm Sunday, leading into the Passion of Christ. Palm Sunday is the day we wave our palms and celebrate the Messiah’s arrival. His arrival was really a public event, as he rode into the ancient city gates on the back of a donkey, throngs waving palms. I imagine the donkey, an animal not yet ridden by humans, had a strong sense that someone very special, holy even, was on his back.

 Jesus is King of Kings, our Messiah. It would follow from this statement of faith that, because Jesus is also the Son of God, that He is a very good king.

 Coming at the “good king” aspect from a different angle, one of the visions of the most righteous and godly king goes way back to ancient times, even as early as the creation stories of Genesis, when God tells Adam and Eve to “till and tend” the garden where they have been planted. This responsibility for what God has given us is called “stewardship.” Stewards were the ancient model for a good king. For a good and righteous king understands that his rule is not for selfish reasons. His rule is so that his kingdom is well-tended.

 We use “stewardship” to talk about our money, primarily. But we have other resources in God’s church which are also important. What are some of the resources you can think of?

-humans

-time

-physical property

 Have you noticed our little black box in the bulletin? Pull out your bulletin and you will see our monthly “statement” for you. About once a month, Sharon updates that information for you to see where our offerings are going and how much money we received from you the previous month. What do you see there?

 We generally run short once a month. Today is not the day for me to ask each of you to give more, as you surely offer what you are able to the church already. However, I would like to encourage you to consider ways we might attract more people, teach generosity, and raise additional funds so we can take good care of what God has given. Please pray about this, search your heart for ideas. There are no stupid ideas. And remember, by using your prayers and imagination – which cost no money – are also means by which you are contributing to the needs of God’s church.

**Prayer for Illumination**

God of the palms,

God of the donkeys

God of all who listen to your voice,

Give life to the words from your Book,

And fill us again,

So we are prepared for your service. Amen.

**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.
9a  It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
          who will declare me guilty?

**Mark 11:1-11**

1When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 2and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it.

3If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”  4They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?”

6They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. 7Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.

8Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.  9Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,
     “Hosanna!
          Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

10       Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
          Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

11Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

**Sermon: A Donkey’s Tale**

My ancestors have been carrying humans and their stuff around since before the time of Abraham. Sometimes they hit me hard if they think I’m too slow. Usually they treat me kindly, especially those who believe in my Creator. My days are usually about the same, working as a pack animal or carrying you humans from place to place. I enjoy getting out of the pen to sniff the breeze, nibble at spring flowers and getting a good rubdown after a long day at work. Humans probably think my life boring, but they think I’m just a dumb animal.

Most of them don’t even remember that I was the one who carried a king.

It happened a long time back, when I was still young yet strong, but no one had ridden me yet. It was a week before Passover. Thousands of people come to the city when the flowers start to bloom. They bring their donkeys, loaded with grain and animals for sacrifices. For me as a young colt that year, the festival was a brand-new experience. And it was then that I was given a most wonderful task, the same task that my ancestors also had – to carry the kings of Israel[[1]](#endnote-1). Two men, who carried with them an aroma, which told me they had been close to God, came to my caretaker and kindly told him that the Lord needs me. “The Lord” they said! Why would the Lord need me, a lowly pack animal?

Well, miraculously, my caretaker just let them lead me away. And while that normally would be frightening for me to be away from him, I felt completely at peace with these strange and holy men. We donkeys have a nose for these things. We can smell fear and all kinds of other things. These two men took me to another man, a man even holier than they. I could tell by the look in his eyes, the aroma of heaven about him, the healing and loving touch that this was The Lord who needed me. They called him “Lord” or sometimes “Jesus” or “Teacher” but I knew who He was. He was God.

The humans have always said that the Savior of the world would ride in on a young donkey one day. That’s why Israelite kings have always chosen us over horses, even when the Persians made fun of them[[2]](#endnote-2).

There’s a little joke among the Hebrew people about me. “The Messiah’s Donkey” refers to anything that does the dirty work for someone else[[3]](#endnote-3). But that assumes that I’m just a dumb animal and that carrying the Messiah – my God, that is – to the city of Jerusalem is “dirty work.” It’s not dirty work at all. It was the best moment of my entire donkey life. It was the moment when my Creator chose me to be His throne amid the waving palms and cheering crowds. I had the most important job of the day, carrying the Lord on my back. He was not heavy, He was perfect. I could sense that He was the hope of the people. I understood the palms, which told everyone He is king. But I could also smell danger – that He was in mortal danger from humans. For all the joy of the day, there were some who hated this public demonstration.

We creatures of the King can tell, maybe better than humans, what’s happening around us. I knew that I carried no ordinary King. I carried God. And even though they killed him in the worst possible way, a week later, I already sensed that nothing, not even Death, could keep Him down. For He was, is and always shall be our Creator, who needed me for a holy moment. What does the Lord need from you?

**The Donkey (G.K. Chesterton)**

When fishes flew and forests walked

And figs grew upon thorn,

Some moment when the moon was blood

Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry

And ears like errant wings,

The devil’s walking parody

On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,

Of ancient crooked will;

Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,

I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;

One far fierce hour and sweet:

There was a shout about my ears,

And palms before my feet.

Source: *The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton* (Dodd Mead & Company, 1927)

1. Donkeys and mules were the preferred form of transport for Israelite kings because it aligned with their believe that the Messiah Himself would arrive on a donkey or mule. See Zechariah 9:9. See also pp 115, 186-187 of Life in Biblical Israel (Philip J. King and Lawrence Stager WJK Press, 2001) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 98a when the Persian King, Shevor, mocks Samuel the Amoraim, “Why doesn’t your Messiah come riding on a horse? If he lacks one, I’ll be glad to provide him one of my fast horses.” In response, Samuel says, “Do you have a horse that has a hundred shades of color? The donkey of the Messiah will be such.” [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See Wikipedia entry for “The Messiah’s Donkey” for more discussion. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Messiah%27s_Donkey> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)