

Sunday, April 2, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

Bible Study

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66

Palm/Passion Sunday: “Who Could Stand?”

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants share their response to the question, “What do you find to be the most significant part of the Holy Week story (the crowd greeting Jesus on Palm Sunday with celebratory palms, Jesus’ teachings at the Temple, the Last Supper, Jesus’ prayers in Gethsemane, Jesus’ betrayal by Judas, Peter’s denial, Jesus’ trial, or Jesus’ crucifixion)?”

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29. Context. This song of praise was probably originally used to accompany a procession to the Temple in thanksgiving for God’s deliverance. It was one of a number of psalms that came to be associated with Passover and the celebration of God’s deliverance of the people from bondage in Egypt. By the first century, the Jewish community had already come to understand that “the stone that the builders rejected” referred to the Messiah, and it was natural that the early Christians would understand it of Jesus, who was rejected by the religious leaders of his day, but who “has become the chief cornerstone” of God’s new relationship with everyone. The “chief cornerstone” is the very first block that sets the location and orientation of a building, and everything else about the building is based on the cornerstones. And so everything about the church is built around Jesus. The passage closes with a description of a joyous procession to the Temple and anticipates the familiar image of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem as he came to celebrate the Passover feast.

Matthew 21:1-11. Context. In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, he emphasizes the humility of Jesus the king, and his mention of the two animals, donkey and colt (which leads to an awkward arrangement for any rider), may have apocalyptic/messianic overtones, especially as it is linked to the fulfillment of Scripture. As at the announcement of Jesus’ birth by the wise men at the beginning of Matthew’s account, here again the “whole city” was frightened by what was happening.

Matthew 26:14-27:66. Context. For many years, the Gospel reading for the Sunday before Easter has included the entire “Passion Narrative,” from Jesus’ last supper with his disciples on Thursday evening, through to his burial on Friday afternoon. This is the climax of the Gospel story. All four evangelists recount it with considerable detail: Jesus’ last meal with his followers; Jesus prays and is arrested; Peter’s denial; the various trials that followed; his execution, death and burial. In Matthew’s telling, the story highlights the conflict of two kingdoms: the kingdom of this world versus God’s kingdom, a

kingdom of violence versus a kingdom of non-violence, a kingdom of hate versus a kingdom of love.

Read Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

Read Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Some reflection questions –

- How did the crowd identify Jesus on Palm Sunday in Matthew 21:11? How is this right and yet still not complete? How was it more true than perhaps they were aware?
- Where do you find yourself in this story? A passive bystander? Part of the crowd who spread the cloaks? Part of the crowd who shouted “Hosannas!”? One who feared betraying Jesus? One of the sleeping disciples?
- Why do you think much of the crowd from Palm Sunday who shouted “Hosanna!” were then shouting, “Crucify him!” on Good Friday?
- What has been most meaningful for you this Lenten season?
- How will you observe Holy Week? What practices might help prepare you to celebrate appropriately the good news of Easter?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Lord, we too cry, “Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!” We yearn for the day when your salvation and justice will be the experience of all people. We continue to repent from when we have failed to be obedient individually and as a church community. Extend your mercy, love, and grace to us again! This week, as we remember again the sacrifice and mercy of Good Friday, give us a fresh experience of your amazing and world-changing grace that burst forth from the good news of Easter Sunday. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.