

# *Order of Worship*

Palm Sunday in Lent, March 28, 2021

WELCOME

**Hello God, thank you for this day.**

**It's 9:03 and we need your help.**

**Guide us by your Holy Spirit to reach new people,**

**Connect us all through Christ's love, and**

**Empower us to love and serve others. Amen.**

PRELUDE *Voluntary V, II. Andante Largo* J. Stanley

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 118:19-29 UMH 839

HYMN 280 *All Glory, Laud, and Honor* ST. THEODULPH

SCRIPTURE Philippians 2:5-11

PASTORAL PRAYER AND 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. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

HYMN 277 *Tell Me the Stories of Jesus* STORIES OF JESUS

SCRIPTURE Mark 11:1-11

MESSAGE Rev. Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 278 *Hosanna, Loud Hosanna* ELLACOMBE

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Voluntary V, III. Moderato* J. Stanley

## **PRAYER CORNER**

Please call the church office at 715-842-2201 or email Pastor Rebecca at [rebecca@fumcwausau.org](mailto:rebecca@fumcwausau.org) if you would like to be prayed for or if you'd like to join a team of people who pray for the people of our church and community.

## **Thirsting for God      *BLESSING*      Pastor Rebecca Voss**

“God bless you!” We say it to people as everything from a sign of appreciation for their service to concern for their health after they sneeze. The word “bless” is from the Latin word *benedicere* (*bene* = well, good; *dicere* = to speak) as well as the Greek word *eulogos* (*eu* = “good”; *logos* = “word, reason”). It literally means to put in a good word for someone. Now you also know the meaning of the words *benediction* and *eulogy*!

From the very beginning, God’s blessings are *on* creation and *through* creation. God’s first blessing was directed toward animals in Genesis 1:22 “*God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’*”. The Lord repeats that blessing to humans after the flood in Genesis 9:1, “*God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’*” When God called Abraham, he promised, “*I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*” (Gen. 12:2-3).

The Old Testament has several key themes connected to blessing. First is the “who”: God promises to bless people who keep the covenant. Second is the “when”: God blesses people when they trust and obey God. Third is the “what”: blessing is often a reward for obedience. Fourth is the “why”: although God rewards obedience, God’s love and grace is the source of all blessing. Finally, the opposite of blessing is a curse that comes from our disobedience.

Applying these principles has left me and many with lingering questions. When something difficult or painful happens, is it because I have disobeyed and either been cursed or lost a potential blessing? Sometimes I can see a connection and must deal with the consequences, but occasionally it seems like God is unjust. A related question is why people who don’t seem to obey God or care about people seem blessed and avoid pain, especially when they cause it? There are no easy answers, but here are some thoughts to consider.

The Old Testament and New Testament are more accurately called the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The “Old” one isn’t bad or irrelevant – it is simply a partial picture of God’s character and covenant. When God comes in human flesh, Jesus, we see the fullness of God in the New Covenant. The Old Covenant is still foundational, but Christ changes our focus. For instance, blessing in the Old Covenant focuses on physical prosperity, but in the New Covenant the emphasis is on the blessing of our spiritual experience in God’s Kingdom, both now and forever.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains “blessing” in a way that was a shift from the Old Covenant: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit...those who mourn...the meek... those who hunger and thirst for*

*righteousness...the merciful... the pure in heart...the peacemakers... those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake*" (Matthew 5:3-12). In verse 45 he also explains the nature of God's blessing: "*He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*"

If anyone has a right to question if God is always fair in the blessing business, it is the Son of God himself. He perfectly loved and obeyed God, yet he was poor, despised, betrayed, and rejected. Ironically, it was his love and obedience to God and grace toward all people that led him to the "curse" of the cross. When Jesus came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover that year, he knew the days ahead would feel nothing like a blessing.

Scholars believe the passage we read today in Phil. 2:5-8 are the lyrics to one of the first Christian hymns. It describes how Jesus left the place of ultimate blessing – heaven – to conquer the curse of sin and evil. "*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.*"

As Passover approached, Jesus humbled himself on a lowly young donkey. Donkeys are often assumed to be stubborn, but that trait is actually a gift of cautiousness that makes them steady and reliable. Riding a donkey connected Jesus with the common people. It was God's way of saying that he came as a king who will serve and save the oppressed. In addition, in that time if a leader entered a city riding on a horse it was a signal that they were coming to declare war, but if they were riding a donkey it signified that they were coming in peace.

Jesus was well-known as a great teacher and healer. Many people recognized him as the ideal leader to help rescue them from their slave-like conditions under the Roman rulers. They cried out, "*Hosanna!*" which means, "Save Us!". They declared, "*Blessed is the one [Jesus] who comes in the name of the Lord!*" (v. 9). It was unlikely that they clearly saw Jesus as the fullness of God in human flesh, but they did see him as God's chosen representative to rescue them. They proclaimed, "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*" (vs. 10).

The history and concept of kingdoms are messy. There have been a few benevolent kings (and queens), but the inherited role of ultimate privilege and power tends to disconnect monarchs from both reality and regular people. The Greek word for kingdom, *basileia*, is the realm in which a king sovereignly rules. The people gathered to welcome Jesus to Jerusalem as he rode in on a colt were assuming Jesus was there to help overthrow the Roman rulers in that region and become their new king. But

his rule is not political or geographical. Jesus knows that he is the King of kings, for the whole world and all time.

The Kingdom of God (also called the Kingdom of Heaven), is not a physical place, but as Jesus describes in Luke 17:21, it is “*in your midst*”. It is supernatural – “*not of this world*”, in contrast to the militant and extravagant nature of all the other worldly kingdoms. The apostle Paul explains that the Kingdom of God is “*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 14:17). The rule of Christ operates in the hearts and minds of those who trust and obey God. It is the true state of blessing.

If Jesus is really the King of kings, then why is the world still so messed up? Why aren't we fully blessed? Why do wars still rage, both between people and within our souls? Here is an analogy from WW II that might help. D-Day, on June 6, 1944, is when the Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy. With the successful completion of this landing, Hitler's fate was sealed. The war was turned and was essentially over, but it took 11 more months of some of the bloodiest battles before the Nazis finally surrendered on May 7, 1945, called VE-Day.

Palm Sunday through Easter is the Christian's equivalent of Christ coming to the beach of Normandy – our “D-Day”. God has come as the rightful King and lays down his power and privilege on the cross to give us victory over sin and spiritual death. Between then and when Christ returns there will continue to be battles with sin and evil, but the war has been won. Our “VE-Day” will come when Christ returns in glory and the enemy of our souls admits defeat. We pray this every time we say the Lord's Prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Zechariah prophesied this (9:9-10, MSG) over 500 years before Jesus rode a lowly donkey into Jerusalem: “*Shout and cheer, Daughter Zion! Raise your voice, Daughter Jerusalem! Your king is coming! A good king who makes all things right, a humble king riding a donkey, a mere colt of a donkey. I've had it with war—no more chariots in Ephraim, no more war horses in Jerusalem, no more swords and spears, bows and arrows. He will offer peace to the nations, a peaceful rule worldwide, from the four winds to the seven seas.*”. Today, the Holy Spirit is asking us to welcome the peaceful rule of Jesus into our hearts and lives. Will you accept the call to humility – even when it feels like a curse – in order to receive the eternal blessing of God? As citizens in the Kingdom of God, we are blessed beyond compare!