

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from March 28, 2021



Music Intro We've been talking about stories of Jesus, his words full of kindness and his deeds full of grace, and we'll be looking another act of healing today along with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. So let's start today's service by covering both of these themes by standing and singing.

Music *Tell Me the Stories of Jesus*

Call to Worship (R1 = Reader 1, R2 = Reader 2)

R1: We sang loudest Hosannas, which is a general word of praise, but it also means "save now" or "save us, we pray". When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the people may well have had both things in mind, praise and a prayer for salvation in mind, for they had high hopes that this was the king who would deliver them from the oppressive system they were living under and restoring them to wholeness.

R2: And it is why we gather here or online, week after week; sharing a common quest for a deeper faith... a deeper experience and a deeper understanding of the divine. Let go of your distractions, your concerns, your to do lists. For the time is drawing near. Jesus is the light that came into this world of ours – a light that became flesh, and he dwelt among us – and beside us. And now he is preparing to enter the city. We find ourselves on our city street among the buzzing crowd. How shall we greet him?

R1: If we have learned anything in this series of moving toward healing and wholeness, it is not only, or even necessarily, the physical world that breaks us and prevents us from being whole and holy. As holy week begins, we will see that our ability to forgive ourselves and others is the foundation that can transform us and allow us to move forward.

R2: The parade of compassionate power we celebrate today will be underscored by another healing story of transformation. We also know that Jesus' healing work was not confined to any specific individual or to any particular moment in history. He still offers a new way of life -- and challenges us to offer that new way of life -- a life that is fueled by community compassion for all, and especially for "the least".

R1: The question is not so much how well we cheer with the rest of the band wagon on this Palm-Passion Sunday. The real question is: are we willing to follow him

all the way to the cross? For it is only through taking up our cross individually and collectively that we can begin to fuel a movement toward recovery.

R2: Throughout Lent, we have acknowledged our need to restore our own holy vessels while attending to our role in the healing of the community and the world. The work of healing will continue only as we integrate what we learn with what we will do. But we also recognize how hard it is to move from thinking beautiful ideas to doing difficult dreams.

Confession

R2: In confession, we lay bare our brokenness in order to begin the process of healing. Let us pray: Forgiving God, It is simple to say or read nice prayers and hear stories of how everything works out and ask the same for us. This season we have attempted to go deeper and open ourselves to you for healing. As difficult as that may be for many of us, it is even yet more difficult to embark on the hard work of putting into action what you ask us to do – to love you by the way we live, and love others as you love us, building a community of mutual forgiveness and support.

Each day we are asked to choose – choices offered by friends, family, culture, even our own past. Some choices encourage the well-being of the earth, ourselves, and neighbors – other choices are destructive.

In difficult days, it is easy for us to remember how fragile and susceptible to shattering our own holy vessels are. As we try to tread lightly carry and contain our own burdens, we tend to tread heavily on others, forgetting to be gracious and failing to forgive; and in our own frustrations, we overlook that others are also weak and vulnerable to brokenness. Too often, we choose badly.

We extinguish this last candle, because our global family, national family, even local family is fractured and fragmented. Throughout the season, the light has faded. To whom will we listen and what will we learn in the dark night of the soul?



R1: Throughout all life's seasons your presence has been, is, and will always be here. But at times, it has been difficult to see your light through the clouds of our circumstances. Help us, Healer. Help us to see ourselves as you see us -- capable of transformation. Help us to believe in the possibility of being transformed by your grace and your strong belief in our potential. Show us our strength. Forgive us our inertia. Inspire us to move one step at a time toward greater care. In this next moment of silence, with a quote on the projection, we confess, and acknowledge our yearning for wholeness. **SILENCE**

Music***Holy Vessels***

Vessels, holy and whole; broken, needing the One.
 Open, body and soul. Healer --- , come.
 (Repeat)

Assurance and Peace

Hold the Palm branch in your hands. Feel its texture. See him entering our city, he is coming near. Know that he is able to help us distinguish between the choices of well-being, and of destruction. May we learn and live the choices of Jesus and embody within ourselves compassionate justice in all we say and do. Glorify God for beautiful words *and* works of wholeness and share that treasured beauty with others. We know there will still be pain, but we also know love will win.

You are never alone. Jesus is on the journey with us. Life's parade is not passing you by. You are a part of the body of Christ. The palm branch in your hand signifies honoring and welcoming Christ to your life -- to our lives together. The palm branch, the Psalmist and the prophet Isaiah speak our hope. The burning sand [of covid, of trials and temptations, of brokenness] will become a refreshing oasis, the parched ground bubbling springs, gushing up in the wilderness and streams will flow through the desert, and the [jackal's haunt] a meadow with grass, reeds, and papyrus. (Isaiah 35:6b-7. Psalm 107:35 (TPT)) Take a deep breath of assurance – you see the trees of the oasis. You feel one of its branches in your hand. God's forgiving renewal and refreshment from the wilderness from sin has come. Let this be our peace. That God's Spirit is within and among his people, in this room or from wherever we stream – his stream of his living water, his presence; filling us with his love and restoring our energy with his strength. The peace of Christ is with us. Let's hum or sing through our masks...

Music *Sweet, Sweet Spirit*

Theme Let's pray. Loving God, we come to you with Hearts [*hands over heart*] Hands [*hands raised*] Minds [*point to head*] And Souls [*praying hands*] In need of your healing touch. Heal us from the inside out [*breathe in and sigh out*] So that we may reach out to help heal your world. Amen.

It can feel good to belong to something special – a team, a choir, a church community, a family. It can even feel good to belong to a large group cheering for something – like an audience at a concert, a crowd at a sporting event, even a parade.

So let's practice our Palm Sunday parade moves. When I wave my palm branch, and when I do, you say "Hosanna". I'd say with energy, but were masked and not supposed to project strongly -- so try and get the energy without projecting too loud! But if you are at home -- you can shout to the roof tops. I'll be listening for that! When I wave my branch, you say Hosanna. Watch carefully... [**Wave several times at different speeds**]. You did pretty good. Some of you at home didn't participate. (Use 2nd and 3rd fingers to point at eyes and then to camera...a couple times] I'll be watching you!... 😊

We did it well.... Following the right person at the right time can be very important, can't it. When you are on a sports team, whose instructions should you follow? (The coach) That's right. How about a choir? (The choir director). Exactly. In organized groups it is easy to know who is in charge and who it is you are supposed to be following. But sometimes when we are in larger, informal crowds, (such as informal times at school or at work or recreation) -- it isn't always clear who is in charge, whose voice to listen to, or who to follow or what to do. I was asked to say a prayer at a Relay for Life event -- great group of people and wonderful event. But I didn't know who the organizer was, where I was supposed to go within that large venue, or when I was supposed to do what I was asked to do - or any of it. It was pretty uncomfortable for quite a while. But that old children's show host, Mr. Rogers, remember him? He used to say, "Look for the helpers. There will always be people who are helping." Well, that is a nice sentiment, but I don't if it is always true, but hopefully there is somebody who will be able to help.

In this case, someone did finally point me in the right direction to make connection with the event organizer and get those answers I needed to be able to do what I needed to do.

But imagine the crowds of holy week. Growing up, I always heard the crowd cheered on this Sunday to Jesus "Hosanna" and then on Friday morning, they cheered on to Pilate to "Crucify", as if it were exactly the same people. We don't really know if it was the same crowd or not. It could have been a completely different crowd, or there could have been some overlap with some who changed their mind, but there is no doubt, there were powerful leaders in those crowds all week long who were calling for very different responses from the people.

Some, with religious standing, and in the name of defending that religion, called for unkind words, for hurt, hate, for victory through violence. To the average person, not knowing the end of the story like we do, it must have been very confusing message.

Mark Burrows gives this advice: When it comes to knowing who to follow, follow the healers. Who are the people trying to bring about peace? Who are the people reaching out with an open hand rather than a clenched fist? Who are the people telling the truth, but not in a hateful way? In other words, “Who is saying what they mean without saying it mean?”

God puts people in our life who will care how we feel and who will help and heal. And as you look for those helpers and healers, you may very well become one too. Others follow you and the world is better because of it. Jesus was, and is, the ultimate healer - kind, loving, gently honest, full of grace and hope.

(R1 = Reader 1 R2 = Reader 2 + C (with CONGREGATION))

R1: Therefore, let’s tell today’s story again. When Jesus and his disciples had come near Jerusalem, at the Mount of Olives ... Jesus sent two disciples to retrieve a donkey and a colt. This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Zechariah, saying,

R1+C: WE WILL REJOICE GREATLY AND SHOUT ALOUD!

R2: Behold, your Messianic King is coming to you. He is righteous, uncompromisingly just, and endowed with triumphant and victorious salvation. He is humble and meek, unpretentious, in complete submission to the will of the Father, and riding on a donkey, upon a colt, the foal of a donkey.

R1: The next day the crowd that had come to the festival heard the Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him. The disciples put their cloaks on the donkey and the colt, and Jesus sat on them.

R2: A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

R1+C: HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!

R2+C: BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!

R1+C: HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN!”

R2: When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying,

R1,R2+C: “THIS IS THE PROPHET JESUS FROM NAZARETH IN GALILEE.”

Music Intro So here we are in the tumultuous crowd, and as Jesus processes by us, let us offer our him glory, laud (that means songs of praise) and honor as well. Let’s sing.

Music # 280 *All Glory Laud and Honor*

Bible Reading Matthew 9:1-8

Intro: Today's story is the climax of the two previous stories. The first we heard last week. Jesus interacts with two would be disciples and warns them that forces are mounting against Jesus and those who would follow him.

This is further illustrated when they cross the lake and a storm suddenly erupts to stop them. Jesus stills the storm and they move on to Gentile territory, where Jesus is confronted by two demons who call him the Son of God.

Long story, short, Jesus sends them into a herd of swine, who then rush down a steep bank and into the sea where they drowned. The pig hands ran to town to tell the story and the whole town came out to meet Jesus -- and begged him to leave their neighborhood. Now we pick up the story.

And after getting into a boat he crossed the sea and came to his own town. And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." Then some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — he then said to the paralytic — "Stand up, take your bed and go to your home." And he stood up and went to his home. When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings. (NRSV)

Following this story Jesus walks by Matthew's tax collecting booth and calls him to follow, which he does by hosting Jesus, his disciples, sinners and tax collectors, Pharisees, and disciples of John the Baptist at his home.

Music Intro In the midst of our Bible reading we get one of the first glimpses of opposition and accusations against Jesus that led to another sentiment in the midst of that tumultuousness city on that day. It is why Palm Sunday is also called Passion Sunday, and foreshadows what happens at the end of the week. At the risk of making you feel like popcorn, let's stand again and sing about this this showdown between Jesus and his detractors.

Music 261 (vv 2,3,4) Lord of the Dance

Message Supporters

I had the reader review Matthew's sequence of events leading into today's text because today is the third of three consecutive stories that are meant to be held

together, about forces that are escalating and coming to a climatic cyclone of conflict.

The first force is portrayed primarily by the religious leaders. They had already been disturbed that his words and deeds were crossing all normal societal and religious boundaries. It is in today's story that the first serious accusations begin. They accuse Jesus of blaspheme.

Then when Jesus called Matthew and they gathered at Matthew's house with equally unsavory characters, they charged Jesus of immorality by associating with rather than cutting himself off from such people, and though not from religious leaders, disciples of John the Baptist also questioned Jesus' disregard of traditional practices.

Once a person is disliked because they don't fit expectations, or our what our mold of what they are supposed to be like doesn't quite jive with what we think is right, it is extremely easy to misinterpret and misrepresent everything they say and do, and the motives laying behind their words and actions. The drive to eliminate this disturbing Jesus has begun and as the chapter closes, when Jesus exorcises a demon, the defamation of Jesus's character is couched in terms that attribute Jesus' power to being in cahoots with the ruler of demons.

And speaking of, that is the second force gathering to create this cyclone that is in this narrative. That that cosmic ruler, who has now thrown at Jesus a storm on the sea -- an image of pre-creation chaos. Genesis 1:2 says it this way in the Amplified version: *The earth was formless and void or a waste and emptiness, and darkness was upon the face of the deep [primeval ocean that covered the unformed earth].* Chaos, and devolving destruction was often seen in the Old Testament as the realm of evil forces. Add to this the next story of some powerful taunting demoniacs who recognized Jesus as the Son of God, but even more, they represented evil's defiant rebellion against God and corruption of creation.

And it is Jesus acting with his Father God's authority -- this is the final force. When I say "final", I mean, the last force I'll mention in this cyclonic triad of forces, but also "final" as in -- the force with the last word, the incomparable ultimate authority over all other forces named or not named. Matthew has been portraying Jesus' authority over the Law and traditions, over social and religious mores, over demons and sicknesses, over would-be followers, over creation, and again in today's story, through phrases like "So that you may know" and titles like "Son of Man" -- phrases drawn from the Old Testament with particular care, Matthew portrays Jesus as the protagonist -- the hero, the cosmic warrior and judge of the last days who is

empowered by God to lead in the cosmic struggle against Satan, execute judgment on evil and its corrupting influences, and frees humanity from it by ushering in a heavenly kingdom that restores an era of human wholeness.

In today's story of the paralytic, it is not just evil's presence that Jesus so easily and immediately overcomes, it is now evil's effects, the most insidious, the most deceptively innocent and appealing -- yet the most perilously, corrupting effect of evil, which is sin. Jesus battle against sin and its effects is the ultimate contest on earth; and Jesus' power over it gets introduced -- in a rather odd way, actually.

¹ And after getting into a boat he crossed the sea and came to his own town. ² And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

The people of the Gadarenes asked Jesus to leave their home and he returned back to Capernaum where his ministry had been so successful. In Mark there is quite an elaborate story, a parallel of the same story, but with much more detail, about how Jesus entered a house and the crowds were so thick that the men brought the paralyzed man to the roof and lowered him down through the roof so that they could get to Jesus. Matthew ignores all of that. He just jumps straight from Jesus arriving on the shore to the men bringing the man to Jesus on a mat.

And Jesus saw their faith. Matthew is trying to show us that Jesus' insight penetrates to the heart of the people who carried the man, and the man himself who said nothing at all. He didn't have to rely on external actions to infer conclusions about a person's faith. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

His first words to the paralyzed man were "Take heart (take courage)" -- a phrase left out of Mark and Luke's recounting of the story. But it does show up in some stories outside the Bible, and in the encouragement meant to inspire even greater faith, and it is always used in connection with the impending healing, which would be the natural assumption; but here Jesus follows it up with what seems to be a completely different kind of a reassurance. That his sins are forgiven. And with this unexpected twist, Jesus' authority is broadened into a new (and most important realm) and this becomes the topic that dominates the story.

We need to pause to clarify again. We've done it a couple times this series. Some people work through the "twist" in the topic by untwisting it and making a direct connection between sin and illness. Granted, that was a common thought in those days. People were sick because they sinned, and they cannot be healed unless they are forgiven by God. But the Bible does not give a consistent thought on this

connection. Sometimes the wicked flourish and the righteous suffer. There is no biblical claim that illness results from law breaking or promises that the righteous will have full health. A number of texts indicate divine acceptance of the disabled just as they are. In fact, this is Matthew's only healing story that implies any connection with illness. Others are healed with no reference to guilt. And other stories of forgiveness include nothing about healing. As once commentator put it, "Within this drama, sin and sickness are connected not because one leads to the other but because both are products of the human condition and the [consequences] of human fallenness. Conversely, forgiveness and healing are related not as cause and effect but as mutually informing [characteristics] of the [coming] kingdom and its power to transform this condition. We have this fallen condition, and we have this restored condition, and Jesus is taking over the first with the latter.

Other than Jesus saying he is forgiven, there is nothing in the story to indicate that the sick man needed any particular kind of forgiveness, any more than the sinners and tax collectors at Matthew's house immediately following this text were in need of healing, yet Jesus gave the rationale for being with them that they were sick and "needed a doctor"; yet there is no known physical disability among them in that story. Matthew is aware of his culture's common thought, but has no interest in applying that link to any individual. Lesson for us? The same is true when John records people asking Jesus who sinned to cause a man's blindness -- his parents or him --- and Jesus answered, "Neither". (John 9:3)

Matthew isn't concerned about the paralytic's sins, or really even his healing. Matthew's primary interest is in proclaiming who Jesus is and what authority he has. And clearly the mumbling scribes in the story jumped on that same thought.

³ Then some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming."

They were not concerned about the healing, but about who is taking what authority, and they said, "He blasphemes." That is, he is insulting God by saying he can do (he can forgive sins) and that is something that only God has the authority to do.

⁴ But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

⁵ For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'?

But Jesus perceives their thoughts. It is the same word used when Jesus sees the faith in the hearts of the ones who carried the paralytic. Now he reads the hearts of the scribes and sees evil. Jesus senses their inner convictions, and to what kind of words and deeds those beliefs would lead. He sees evil and like a

prophet pronouncing divine judgment, and he calls them on it. Then he challenges their hearts and belief system by asking, “Which is easier -- to say your sins are forgiven or to say stand and walk?”

That is an interesting question, isn't it? From one point of view, it is obviously easier to say the words “You are forgiven”, because how can you prove it one way or the other? On the other hand, telling someone who can't walk to “walk” -- that is external and very demonstratable, and very embarrassing if it doesn't happen.

But that doesn't mean that true forgiveness is an easier task than the healing of a body, only that it is easier to get away with. After all, Jesus wasn't the only healer walking around in those days, but in their minds, only God could grant true forgiveness and cleanse the guilt of sins. And if Jesus could do that in reality, then he was acting with God's authority, or God's authority were active in him. So it is actually harder to forgive and cleanse sins than heal a body.

But because of the mindset that the scribes had, and many people then had in that day -- where sin causes disease always, and disease can't be healed without forgiveness -- Jesus had an opportunity to prove both by getting the man to get up and walk -- by healing the physical body, he has shown to them that true forgiveness must have taken place, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to get up and walk.

⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.” ⁷ And he stood up and went to his home.

He tells them, “So that you may know” an Old Testament phrase often used in connection with God's sovereign control, that the Son of Man (a label taken from Daniel, used of God's end times judge) that he has authority to forgive -- he healed the man who did as he was instructed. He took his bed, mat, pallet; whatever word you want to use -- it was a poor man's laying place, and he took that and he walked home. This healing spoke less to the nature of the healed than to the nature of the healer -- the clear-cut indisputable authority -- of Jesus. As always in Matthew -- the cure is immediate and complete. It emphasizes that his healing power given from God is so much stronger and above all the powers of illness. It'd be like Superbowl champions taking on a bad peewee team. There is no contest. Such is God's authority over *all* things, and it is chosen to exercise it in his Son Jesus Christ.

^{8a} When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God,

And the crowds recognized it too! They glorified God because they saw beyond the physical healing to the spiritual reality that that healing represented -- the authority had been given... They saw this forgiveness and healing was not just for this person, but for all people. For we are all susceptible to forces beyond our control or comprehension. This healed individual is not just a healed individual who is forgiven. His pre-existing condition becomes a metaphor for what sin does to our lives -- not saying that it was sin that did this to this man, only that Matthew saw this man a metaphor for what sin does to our lives (perhaps not physically, but sometimes) -- it incapacitates us, it binds us, it enslaves us, it disables us, sometimes to the point where we cannot even approach Jesus on our own; we are so damaged by sin.

We must rely on the supporting faith of the community to help us discover the liberation provided by this cosmic judge, this warrior, this power of the Son of Man. But when we get there, we realize there is nothing in the realm of humanity that is beyond the saving grace of Jesus.

^{8b} who had given such authority to human beings.

The people were in awe that such authority was given to human beings -- and in a little way, they meant Jesus, because Jesus was human... but more likely, it also anticipates Jesus delegating that same authority to his disciples, to the church.

Walter Wilson writes this: "I find it highly significant that the only story in [Matthew] that suggests a connection between healing and forgiveness is also a story that shows the healed person being -- both literally and figuratively -- supported by others." It wasn't only the faith of the sick man, which was only implied, in fact; but the faith of those who helped him get to Jesus that made this event even possible, and that was noticed by Jesus.

It is one thing to be a supporter at a happy parade, right? Wave your palms, right? Yes. It is one thing to be a supporter at a happy parade. It is another thing to be a supporter who finds the faith to follow Jesus into storms and into uncomfortable territory -- and to help people seek and reach his forgiving presence, the presence that defeats everything that corrupts human existence and will someday usher in a new era of human wholeness, an era that has already begun. It is a tall order to be a part of such a quest, such a mission, because as we know, supporters at a happy parade can go home, supporters in uncomfortable cyclones go to the cross. What kind of supporter are we?

And yet, we want to be like Jesus, and to have a powerful and positive impact on the world, even in our own small section of our world. --- and we do have an impact, but sometimes it is hard to see -- we don't see many take up their mat and walk very often -- we don't see external evidence of many instant and dramatic transformations -- body or otherwise... and we can't easily see, much less measure, what happens even in our own hearts, much less in the hearts of others. We don't know what kind of impact we are having. So sometimes it *feels* like we are failing to be the support for each other, the supports that we are called to be.

And sometimes, as Paul described his inner battle, we do in fact, from time to time, fail to do the things we want to do, and continue to do the things we want to stop doing. And our goal of Christlikeness, of representing him by our words and deeds, falls short. There is actually a song in our hymnal that voices that particular prayer? We're going to sing it right now.

Music

Dear Jesus in Whose Life I See

Dear Jesus, in whose life I see all that I would, but fail to be,
let thy clear light forever shine, to shame and guide this life of mine.
Though what I dream and what I do in my weak days are always two,
help me, oppressed by things undone, O thou whose deeds and dreams were one.

Prayers

Let's pray. Lord, we confess we have days where we feel like we are paralyzed on our mat, desperate for -- but feeling we are unable to find, or afraid to ask, for support. We also confess that at times we have been called to be that one who will take up a corner of someone else's mat, but having been healed, we simply went home. And other times we have offered or tried but have not succeeded in getting others into your presence, and we are saddened.

Strengthen our resolve. Inspire us to continue to offer our best for you, even when the results are beyond our view, but trusting that you are working behind our perceptions, making a difference in others through us, and the gifts of time, and energy, and skills with which you have blessed us.

We do pray especially for those who feel they are on the mat, and those who are finding it burdensome to help carry someone else's.

We pray this day for...

* Jeff and Linda Gordinier's son's father-in-law who had complications after surgery * For all the volunteers and front line workers who gladly give their time to administer the vaccines and who care for the sick. * Karen Nowak's sister

Rita is back in hospital. * Karen Nowak's daughter and family - with covid
 * Fran's niece Sherri back in hospital and nearing the end of her fight with cancer. Pray for teenage son Christopher and all family and friends in that situation.

Help us to see, or at least trust that our efforts in you are not in vain. We give thanks that when we cannot bring ourselves to the healing source of your love, there are others around us that, through words and actions, bring us hope once again. At the same time, help us to be more and more, that community that offers hope when we have the opportunity on this parade of compassion called life. It begins by living as you taught us to pray... **Lord's Prayer.**

Ritual Action and Commission

Parade of the suffering paralytic carried on a mat, parade of the suffering servant carried on a donkey -- two stories, both leading to two extreme reactions -- one of joyful support and one of slanderous accusation. As a witness in these unorganized, undefined crowds -- whose words, whose leadership will we pay attention to?

Jesus continues his work regardless of reactions. He loved those that were deemed unlovable. He proclaimed healing amid despair. He urged people to give their best during the worst of circumstances. To be followers of Jesus is not an easy task. He often leads us into the broken places to help broken lives even as we seek our own healing. Healing is not always an absence of illness, but a trust that God has entered our difficulties, he holds us in his arms -- and is molding us into something beautiful, not always out of our brokenness, but even in our brokenness. Those who received Lent Kits (you can see the one here in the church on the screen) received at least one Palm frond bent into the shape of a cross. Particularly appropriate as we anticipate that the hails of praise to the Son of Man on this Palm Sunday will be overshadowed by the hailstorm of events leading to his Passion only days away. If you have not added your palm cross



into your Lent Kit display, do so this week, if it was already there, perhaps rearranging it so it becomes more of a focal point this week. And you also may want to take a stone representing yourself and lay it at the foot of that palm cross, and if you do your meditations by the kit, take up that stone and hold it while you

pray as a reminder that God holds us in his hands, and he is telling us who have come to him through the cross, through Jesus, to take heart, take courage. Courage in the face of difficulty, courage in the face of being disheartened, courage because Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem -- to face what he was about to face -- is a sign that they, that we -- are worthy to be saved.

Take heart because Jesus has come down main street, and coming to our homes, and whatever we are feeling, if we are feeling good we can call hosanna in praise, and confident that he is going to make a difference in the world through us -- or if we feel like we have no significant impact, or like we have failed him -- or others -- we can we can take heart and call Hosanna as a prayer of salvation and wholeness -- because Jesus -- the Prince of Peace -- is coming, coming with hope for those who feel beat up by life, hope for those who feel helplessly imprisoned by sin or other circumstances seemingly beyond their control. He is coming for you and he is coming for me. Let's stand and sing with joy, along with the recording,

Music *Pave the Way with Branches*

Jesus is coming, Pave the way with branches.

Jesus is coming, Hosanna.

Repeat

Refrain

Hosanna, Jesus is coming, Hosanna, to the Prince of Peace (Repeat)

Hope for the downtrod. Pave the way with branches.

Hope for the downtrod, Hosanna.

Repeat

Refrain

Release for the captives. Pave the way with branches.

Release for the captives. Hosanna.

Repeat

Refrain

Blessing Now go with confidence that God is making us whole and holy, recovering our depth of love for all and our joy of living in this world. May the words of Jesus ring in your ears: "Take heart." And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver salve to your souls and a spring in your steps. Amen.