

APRIL 5, 2020: PALM SUNDAY

CENTERING OURSELVES FOR WORSHIP:

If you have a candle - real, battery-operated or imaginary - please get it ready to light.

Remember that this is Lent, and we are choosing to leave the Christ candle unlit until Easter. If we were worshiping all together, there would be six Lenten candles at the front, and the first four candles for Lent would already be lit. Picture that in your mind.

- The first candle commits us to saying "yes" to the ways of Jesus.
- The second candle is our promise to being a blessing to others.
- The third candle signifies that we will worship anytime, anywhere.
- The fourth candle reminded us to be grateful that we already have all we need.
- The fifth candle believing with hope that all things are possible through Him.

And today we light the sixth candle ...

We know that life can change "on a dime". Palm Sunday, commemorating Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, seemed the victory the disciples had been anticipating. But, we know, a few days later, that all that changed to the apparent defeat of all their hopes, changing the world forever.

Light the 6th candle for Lent

As we light the 6th candle of Lent, we are reminded that no matter what the circumstances and in the times of those life changing events, God is with us always through the presence of the risen Christ.

OPENING PRAYER

God of all creation, you are love.
In joyful times, in excited times...
In times of sadness, in times of fear...
You are the love that holds us.
Whenever we are in the crowd,
Moving right beside Jesus,
Waving and shouting from the sidelines,
Or perched at the edge, wondering,
Help us to know we are yours.
We are loved.
Amen

SCRIPTURE:

Prayer: Merciful God, pour on us your strength and courage to sustain us as we are witnesses to your love.

Optional Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

This version is sung by Michael Talbot. It is 6 minutes long with the musical prelude lasting 1:45.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-aLVo72518>

Gospel: Mark 14: 12-26

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the day the lambs for the Passover meal were killed, Jesus' disciples asked him, "How do you want us to prepare for the celebration of Passover?"

Then Jesus sent two of them with these instructions:

"Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house he enters, and say to the owner of the house: 'The Teacher says: Where is the room where my disciples and I will eat the Passover meal?'

Then he will show you a large upstairs room, fixed up and furnished, where you will get everything ready for us."

The disciples left, went to the city, and found everything just as Jesus had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.



When it was evening, Jesus came with the twelve disciples.

While they were at the table eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples.

"Take it," he said, "this is my body."

Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it. Jesus said,

**"This is my blood which is poured out for many,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant."**

Then they sang hymns and went out to the Mount of Olives.

The soldiers came into the garden and arrested Jesus

The next morning Pontius Pilate sentenced Jesus - death on a cross.

At the third hour - that is 9 o'clock in the morning - they crucified Jesus.

At noon the whole country was covered with darkness.

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout: "Eloi Eloi lema sabachthani?" This means 'My God, My God, why did you abandon me?'

**Then with a cry,
Jesus died.**

They wrapped Jesus' body and placed it in a tomb.

If you lit a candle - snuff the candle out.

Pause for a moment of silent prayer ...

And we know, on the third day God raised Jesus up from the dead to be among the living - among us, with us - the Christ.

Relight your candle.

MESSAGE: Standing at the foot of the cross

This message has been prepared by Dr. Deb Zeni for the Faith United Milton congregation on April 5, 2020, and shared with Palermo United. Any comments you might like to pass along after reading it can be sent to drdzeni@gmail.com ©2020 Dr. Deb Zeni. Provided here with permission.

Today, Passion Sunday, we find ourselves standing at the foot of the cross with Mary and John. We all recognize this place because we have been here before in our lives.

But this time is different.

Before we came alone, following loss.

Now, with Covid, the space at the foot of the cross is really crowded.

The whole world seems to be present: the sick, the dying, and folks like you and me and my Mom and Dad. We come looking for God's help.

We hide our shaking hands in our pockets hoping no one will notice our fear. Masks cover our trembling lips.

But our wide-eyed eyes tell of a threat out of all proportion...

... to what is contained in our own personal space.

I don't know whether Mary, Jesus' mother, trembled with fear as she stood at the foot of the cross on which Jesus hung, dying. I don't know whether the tears, running in rivers from her eyes as she witnessed the depravity of humanity, were for us or for her son, Jesus.

We do know, for certain though,
darkness covered the world.

It was a different darkness than the gloom invading our lives and homes, but the effect was the same. The darkness covered up, and hid from sight, the Christ, and revealed only a broken man. The darkness rattled the disciples so much their bones shook, and they fled, and stayed at a distance.

The foot of the cross is a scary, dark place.

And it is here at the foot of the cross we find ourselves - in a deep darkness that grows as the body counts go up and the days of social isolation stretch into weeks or maybe months. Before

Covid we were not naive; we all have experienced suffering, chaos and dying in our lives. But Covid has stripped away the naiveté we enjoyed as communities, who put trust in our leaders, and one another, to do our best and do our duty.

And the darkness seems to be growing thicker, obscuring our ability to discern the presence of God. These times demand we develop infrared vision to see in the dark, and sharpen our native abilities to access scarce resources. The darkness is taking on the stench of threat, and the smell of corruption is wafting around the foot of the cross.

Know this: we were not created to bear the burden of this cross called Covid. God knows we will break under the weight, just as Peter did before the cock crowed and morning came.

Know this: God does not expect us to walk a tightrope, keeping the faith and fighting fear. God knows we will fall, just as Peter did.

And God knows, as we stand at the foot of the cross, the darkness blinds us to his presence. God hears our cry, the cry of Jesus: "O God, O God. Why have you abandoned us?" And God answers us.

On the holiest of night over 2,000 years ago Jesus, following the tradition of the Passover took bread, blessed it and broke it. Then, as he offered the broken bread to his disciples, he said words never said before:

"Take and eat. This is my body."

Blessing the cup of wine set apart for the Messiah, Jesus offered thanks to God and gave it to his disciples saying new words - words never said before:

"This is my blood, my spirit, my life,
the very essence of who I am.
This is my gift to you and all peoples -
myself bound by love to you for all time."

Jesus continued the giving. Picking up the burden of our suffering, Jesus gives his life on the cross. The cross at who's foot we stand. As the Good Shepherd lays his life down for his sheep, Jesus gives his life to us, for us, so we may have life, abundant life - his life in us, and with us,

and among us for all time.

Jesus' gift of himself at the Last Supper and on the cross is offered to us - an offering of unconditional, unbounded love for all time.

Jesus' death on the cross reveals God as a fellow-sufferer. Jesus' gift of life to us on the cross reveals the depth and the height of God's great love for all humanity.

Through his death on the cross Jesus stands among us,
together with us, where ever and whenever we are in need of help.

So, WE do not need to pick up the cross of Covid. Jesus has already picked it up. We do not need to bear the burden of the world's suffering as we jostle with one another at the foot of the cross. God has already picked up the burden and carries it for us until the end of time.

So what can we do as the darkness cast by Covid looms over us?
How can we prepare for our passing over from pre-Covid to post-Covid, from Good Friday to Easter Sunday?

We are called not to do, but to be.

Be like Mary. Stand at the foot of the cross and ponder, wonder.
Let God's great love pour over you. Feel Jesus's arms around you, giving you comfort, easing your loneliness.

Breathe, open your hands, and ask for help.

And God will fill you with the life Jesus so dearly and truly claims for us on the cross - His life - taken, blessed, broken and given.

Amen

HYMN: Ride on, Ride on, in Majesty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo5pfl6z6IA> (2 min)

CLOSING PRAYER:

Thank you God for your gift of Jesus, for faith leaders, for friends and family who care for us, for all caregivers - especially first responders and health-care workers on the front lines.

Be with those that need your strength and courage, to face illness and despair.

We yearn for the fulfilment of God's desire - wholeness and health for all.
We long to live beyond the brokenness and neediness of this time.
We offer thanksgiving for God's presence with us.

Let us offer up our prayers for the healing and transformation of the church and the world.

Amen