



Dead Palms and an Empty Church, Sunday of the Passion

Christ Church UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Rev. Dan Stark

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April 5, 2020

On this Palm-Passion Sunday, we continue our journey into *The Wilderness*. In our scriptures from Isaiah, we hear the description of the Suffering Servant of God, whose identity Christians have come to know in Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, we begin with the triumphant procession of Jesus into Jerusalem. We continue with the story of Jesus' trial, crucifixion and death. By the end of the week the palm branches will dry on the roadside. The joyful crowd will become an angry mob. Their cries of "hosanna, save us!" will become chants of "crucify him!" Jesus' robes of victory will be replaced with a crown of thorns. The wilderness is a place of letting go.

Words of Welcome

A Song for Today

(Recorded by The Orchard Enterprises)

[*All Glory, Laud and Honor*](#)

Melchior Teschner

Call to Worship

One: On Palm Sunday so many years ago, the people saw Jesus and asked,

All: Who is this?

One: So in worship, we respond. In worship, we declare:

All: Jesus is the alpha and omega.

One: Jesus is our teacher and preacher.

All: Jesus is a miracle worker and healer.

One: Jesus is our source of love.

All: Jesus is our path in the wilderness.

One: So may we lay down our hearts like they laid down their coats.

All: Let us worship Holy God!

Prayer by Sarah Are / A Sanctified Art LLC / sanctifiedart.org

Old Testament

[Isaiah 50:4-10](#)



Isaiah is the longest of the prophetic books in the Bible, covering a long span of Israel's history before, during, and after the exile in Babylon. The prophet offers words of harsh judgment and comforting words of promise. In this reading, we hear about the "suffering servant" of God. The servant is one who suffers not for their own iniquities, but for the sake of others. He "bore the sin of many." Christians have come to know the Suffering Servant in the person of Jesus.

*"Christ on Gethsemane"
Jesus Mafa, Cameroon, 1973*

Wilderness Poem

A Place Where We Are Brave

Sarah Are

First, we have to name it—
The heartbreak,
The addiction,
The shame,
The grief.
Whatever your wilderness is,
First we have to name it.
And once we've said those words out loud,
We let that truth hang in the air.
And we let ourselves feel what we feel,
For in this moment,
we are close to the surface.
And after a few deep breaths,
We begin the removing.
Piece by piece, we take our armour off,
For truth-telling days are
Soft skin kind of days.
And once we are armour-free,
Hearts on our sleeves

And tears in our throats,
We stand toe-to-toe
With the very hurt that wrecked us.
And we don't try to swallow that pain away.
And there,
In all our beautiful God-given honesty,
We say to that monster,
"I have love on my side,
And her name is God,
And no wilderness can separate me
From that north star."
And I believe
It will be the bravest thing you ever do.
And your knees might shake,
And you might lose your way,
But our God is a God of second chances,
So take my hand.
You are close to the surface.
Let's be brave together.

The Palm Procession

[Matthew 21:1-11](#)

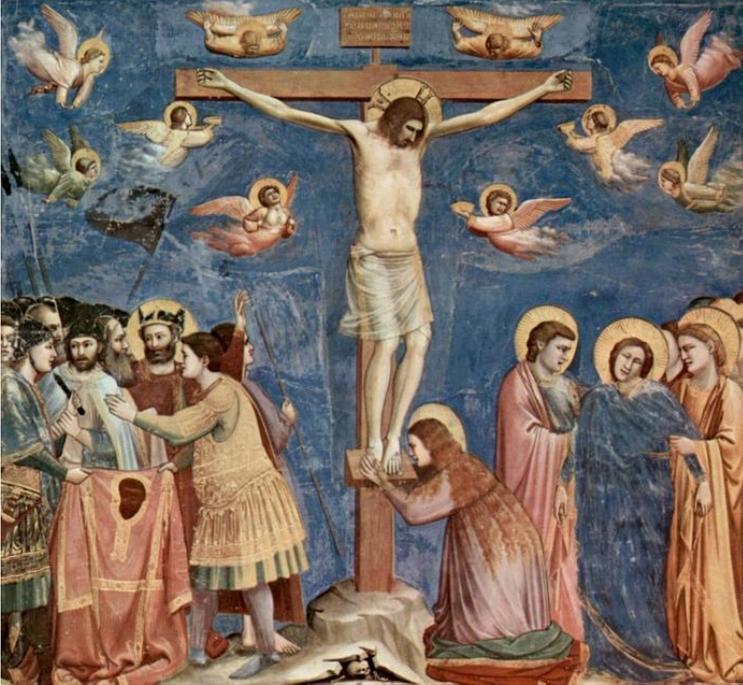
Matthew's Gospel is particularly concerned with the identity of Jesus as teacher and messiah. In this scripture, Jesus enters Jerusalem during a celebration of him as the coming Son of David. The theme of "letting go" is front and center in this reading, as people let go of palm branches, lay down their cloaks, give up their donkey, and release their hopes and dreams to Jesus as he enters Jerusalem. Jesus inches towards his fate on the cross.

"Entry of Christ into Jerusalem"
Morgner, Wilhelm, 1891-1917



The Passion of Jesus

[Matthew 27:11-54](#)



Matthew's Gospel gives the account of Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and death. Jesus' disciples are faithful to Jesus, but they fail to stay by his side during his time of need.

The religious leaders, Pilate, the Roman soldiers, and crowds reject, ridicule, and hurt Jesus for their own ends. Jesus remains obedient to God – even as he is killed upon the cross.

A Roman Soldier leaves the reader with a stunning revelation: "Surely, this one was God's Son!"

"Crucifixion"
Giotto, 1266-1337

Sermon The Wilderness: A Place of Letting Go

Prayer Requests and Pastoral Prayer

Prayers for...

For Josh who faces serious surgery for melanoma.

For friends and family who reside in Potosi where a tornado hit over the weekend.

For Rev. Tory Topjian and the Milwaukee Metropolitan community church congregation whose building was broken into and vandalized.

For Roland and Loretta Senderhauf, as Roland's Alzheimer's continues to progress and he recovers from recent falls.

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God,

On Sunday the city of Jerusalem cheered for you. They laid down coats and palms for you. They shouted "Hosanna!" and called you king. But on Friday they abandoned you. On Friday they yelled "Crucify him!" On Friday, you were in the wilderness alone. God, we want to be Palm Sunday Christians, but we know all too well that we also are the Good Friday crowd. So today we ask for forgiveness. Forgive us for the moments when we deny you and your message of love. Forgive us for preventing the spread of the gospel. Forgive us our sins.

Amen.

Prayer by Sarah Are / A Sanctified Art LLC / sanctifiedart.org

A Song for Sending

[*Hosanna*](#)

Andrew Lloyd Weber

Whatever wilderness the Spirit has brought you to:
walk in boldness, as a beloved child of God
walk in peace, under the shelter of the Most High
walk in faith, knowing Christ walks with you.
Amen.

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If you should need to contact the Pastor, please email pastor@uccmke.org or call 507-951-2856
If you should need to contact the Church Office, please email office@uccmke.org or call 414-481-3530.

You can make your offering to Christ Church through [PayPal](#) or by mailing a check to Christ Church,
915 East Oklahoma Ave, Milwaukee, WI, 53207.

