

WPALM SUNDAY
The Wilderness Journey from Palms to Passion
Liturgy by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.

WORDS OF WELCOME

Good morning and welcome to this time of worship with McClure United Church.

I am going to jump right into announcements this morning and I have only a few.

First I want to extend an invitation to you to join us for a Maundy Thursday Service Zoom Communion Service Thursday at 7pm.. you'll need to pre-register to get the Zoom link for that.

At 10am Friday will be a simple and brief Good Friday service for you to watch on Facebook or YouTube.

There will be a live Easter Sunrise service on Sunday at 6:20am.

The link for this and the Maundy Thursday service can be found on our website, Facebook page and in the weekly email. And there will be the regular 9am worship service Easter Sunday at 9am on Facebook and Youtube.

Also, I want to invite you all to join us for an important congregational chat. As we think about life post pandemic, we are reflecting on what we have learned about what it means to be McClure United Church. Having done church quite differently for the past year, we are wondering... what things that we aren't doing should we continue to not do... what things that we are doing now that we should keep doing. So we really need your thoughts and reflections.. what are the things you miss the most? What are the things you're glad we aren't doing? What have we started doing that you really appreciate? It will be a fairly informal conversation but we would love to hear from everyone. Your opinion matters to us. So there will be two Zoom conversations.. one on Tuesday, April 6 at 7pm and on Thursday April 8 at 2pm. There is also a possibility for some in person small group chats but we don't know when or how those can happen at this point. You can also send in your reflections, questions and ideas to me or to the church office if that works better for you. Its exciting to think about coming back together.

And that's it for announcements that I need to share with you today. There are others but all of them can be found in the email, on the website and our Facebook page.

Today is a special service because this week is unlike any other week in the Christian calendar.

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, Jesus' joyous entry into Jerusalem.

But we will also turn to the events that followed, walking through the moments that led up to Jesus' arrest.

We'll do this as if journeying day by day, because just like our lives, holy week happened day by day.

In our service, we will incorporate the tradition of midrash.

Midrash is an ancient Jewish tradition that weaves together the art of storytelling and the truth of scripture, inviting us to imagine and wonder about the details that exist between the lines.

Today you will hear from five voices:

a woman who witnessed Jesus flip the tables in the temple,

a Pharisee,

the woman with the alabaster jar who anointed Jesus' feet in Bethany,

Judas,

and one of Jesus' disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was arrested.

As you hear these stories read aloud, we invite you to lean in.

Imagine yourself there.

Feel the truth of this narrative—for it was a holy week, and it was a hard week.

Let us begin.

We light this candle now as we prepare to hear God's word for us today... as a reminder of the God's loves for each one of us. (pause)

On Palm Sunday so many years ago, the people saw Jesus and asked, who is this?

Today we respond.

Today we remember that Jesus is a miracle worker and healer.

Jesus is a teacher and preacher.

Jesus is our light in the darkness.

Jesus is our source of love.

Jesus is our path in the wilderness.

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

Let us worship Holy God.

SUNG OPENING: Love Us Into Fullness vs 1 – Elin Sletmoen

SCRIPTURE READING: Sunday | Matthew 21:1-11

It was Sunday morning.

"When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

"Tell the daughter of Zion,

Look, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,

and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking,

ALL MIDRASH READERS: "Who is this?"

The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

And this is where the story begins.

OPENING LITANY | "Who is this?"

During the litany, organ music can be played quietly behind the words to add depth and texture.

ALL: Who is this?

M1: I heard he was a carpenter's son.

M2: I heard he was from Nazareth.

M4: Can anything good come from Nazareth?

ALL: Who is this?

M4: I heard he knew John the Baptist.

M5: I heard he was related to John the Baptist.

M2: I heard he can heal people.

M3: Do you think he can heal me?

M4: Who is he?

M5: I heard he talks to gentiles.

M2: I heard he talks to children!

M3: And women!

M1: And tax collectors!

M4: Seriously, who is this?

M5: I heard he's the Son of David.

M2: I heard he's the Son of Man.

M3: I heard he's the one we've been waiting for.

M1: I heard he was born of a Virgin.

M2: I heard he was born in a stable.

ALL: Who is this?

M2: Why is he riding a donkey?

M3: How does he have so many followers?

M1: Do you think Caesar knows that a man from Nazareth has been welcomed with such a large parade?

ALL: Who is this?

M3: I don't know who he is, but I've heard he's gracious and kind.

M1: I heard he fed five thousand.

M5: I heard he survived the wilderness.

M4: I heard he helped the blind man see.

M3: Do you think he sees me?

M2: I heard he walked on water! Is that even possible?

M5: I heard he can save us.

M3: I heard he can save all of us.

M2: Who is this?

ALL: Who is this?

HYMN | "All Glory, Laud & Honor" Merilynn Coomber

Invite people to wave their palm branches

SCRIPTURE READING: Tables Turned | Matthew 21:12-13

¹² Then Jesus entered the temple^[a] and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer';

but you are making it a den of robbers."

DRAMATIC READING: Monday | The Woman in the Temple

MIDRASH READER #1 (M1): I come here every Monday morning.

It has always been like this, at least for as long as I can remember.

My parents talk about a time when this room used to be packed with people here to pray and hear the Torah every week. They talk about those days like they were the glory days—if only we could get back to that.

Now?

Now the temple is primarily a marketplace.

I come here every week for the farmer's market—to buy eggs and figs and food for my family. And they have the best bread! I've never felt guilty for that because I pray on my own, and we still celebrate passover; so is it really that big a deal?

I used to think not, but that changed the day Jesus showed up.

I don't know that I will ever forget that day. I had just bartered with Samuel down the street to get two fresh fish for my kids. That's when I heard the sound.

It was so loud—a crash, a splintering.

For a brief moment I thought God might be tearing open the walls of the temple and climbing inside.

I turned around, hands full of fish, to see the money changers' tables turned over and the doves flapping wildly in their cages. Coins slowly rolled their way across the holiest of holies and everyone froze.

I've never heard silence so loud.

Jesus paused and looked at the room. Quietly he said, "My house is to be called a house of prayer. *Prayer*. For *all* nations."

In the quiet, I felt myself hiding the two fish in my hands behind my back, like Adam and Eve hid behind leaves, wishing the coins in my hands could disappear.

And then, as quickly as he arrived, he turned and left.

I can't be sure, but it looked like there might have been a tear running down his cheek, and for just a second, I wondered to myself—maybe, just maybe, that sound really was God tearing open the walls of the temple and climbing inside.

Who is he, you ask?

I'm not sure, but he's not like me. He's faithful. He's honest. There was nothing hiding behind his back.

Have any of you ever felt that kind of shame? Have any of you ever wanted to hide something from God?

SCRIPTURE READING: Authority Questioned | Matthew 21:23

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

DRAMATIC READING: Tuesday | A Pharisee

MIDRASH READER #2 (M2): Do you know how many laws are in the Torah? Six hundred and thirteen. You know how I know that? Because I spent my entire youth memorizing them—hours upon hours upon hours of repetition.

And after I mastered those, I went on to memorize the entire Torah. That's the first five books of the Bible, by the way.

I spent all those hours sitting at the foot of my teacher so that I could one day teach.

That's what faithfulness, sacrifice, and a life of service looks like—at least that's what I've been taught.

I've talked to every scribe and priest in the land and no one knows who taught this Jesus. No one raised him to teach. No one knows if he even passed his Torah comprehension exam. Where does he get his authority? AND

WHY ARE PEOPLE LISTENING TO HIM?

That is the thing that blows me away.

His teachings are unorthodox.

He's healed on the Sabbath.

He's talked to Samaritans.

He's completely disregarded our societal lines—befriending women and lepers.

Does he even know how many rules he's breaking?

I just don't understand.

This isn't the way it's supposed to be.

I studied for so long, and nothing prepared me for this.

Who is he, you ask?

He's a radical. A heretic. A rebel.

[pause]

A mystery.

SCRIPTURE READING: Anointed | Matthew 26:6-13

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,^[a] ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. ⁸ But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “Why this waste? ⁹ For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.” ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. ¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this good news^[b] is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

DRAMATIC READING: Wednesday | The woman with the alabaster jar

MIDRASH READER #3 (M3): It was Wednesday.

I heard he was coming to Bethany. People talk about stuff like that.

People also talk when you break open a bottle of perfume to anoint someone in a crowd. I learned that the hard way.

In a few years they may forget my name, but I bet they’ll remember what I did. I am the woman who anointed Jesus, and it remains one of the moments in my life that I am most proud of.

Jesus was at Simon’s house. He often went there when he was in the city, and I knew that. We all knew that, because we could see them packed in there! It’s hard to miss twelve people packed into a room. So before the sun fell, I grabbed my jar of perfume—the only item of wealth I own—and walked to Simon’s.

I had begged and saved for years to afford that jar of perfume. It was my back-up plan, my safety net when I could no longer work, so I kept it hidden in the cupboard of my house.

The whole way to Simon’s house I clutched that jar like a mother holds a baby—terrified that it might slip from my hands too soon, that I might lose the only gift I had to give, accidentally anointing the dirt at my feet instead of the man who had healed so many.

It wasn’t until I walked through the door and saw Jesus sitting there that I was able to release my grip on that jar. I had made it. I had my gift, and this was the moment.

The smell was unbelievable—sweet like milk and honey, but even stronger than fresh baked bread. I knew when I cracked that jar open it would be overpowering, it would send people into the street. But I had to do it! People criticized me for wasting that perfume, but they don’t know the whole story. They don’t know what it meant to be seen and called by name. Jesus pulled me out of the wilderness of my own isolation. They have no idea the healing that Jesus offered me, and they probably could never understand what I would give to do it all over again. I mean, how do you put a price tag on life? On a full and abundant life?

I don’t need everyone to understand. I just needed him to understand. He gave me the gift of new life, so in return, I gave him the only thing I had.

Who is this man, you ask?

He was grace embodied, and love let loose.

And I’ll never be the same.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Betrayal | Matthew 26:14-16

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

DRAMATIC READING: Wednesday | Judas

MIDRASH READER #4 (M4): Could he have really been the Messiah—the son of God? Could he really be the One that God would send to redeem the world? *Really?!*

There were days I was convinced he was. Like the day he fed five thousand people. I still can't figure out how he did it, but I was there and people ate their fill. Or the night he told Peter to walk to him on the water. I could never begin to tell you how that happened, but I was there—it felt real!

But, there were other days I wasn't so sure. Like the day he sent us out two by two to heal people—did he really expect us to be able to do what he did? Or the days he rebuked the Pharisees. Could the Son of God really be that hard on people, especially the leaders of the law?

I wanted to believe he was the Messiah. I really did. I wanted to give everything I had, but something deep within me wasn't settled. I was beginning to lose sleep over it and the Pharisees began whispering in my ear. What if he wasn't all he said he was? What if everything I saw could be explained? What if I had risked my life, only to find out he was just another great teacher among many?

It was that unsettled voice deep within me that told me to do it. That small voice was more powerful than my will, my thoughts, and my faith. It ruled me, and I followed it.

Most people said I betrayed him for the money, but that would be too simple.

I handed him over because I couldn't know who he was for certain. There is no black and white, no hundred percent proof when it comes to God. Doubt is an untamed wilderness of the mind, and that shade of gray ate at me.

Who was that man, you ask?

If you would have asked me last week, I would have told you, "I'm not entirely sure."

Ask me on Sunday and my answer will have changed.

LAST SUPPER: Thursday Evening | The Last Supper

Play video clip.

SCRIPTURE READING: The Garden | Matthew 26:36-47

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." ³⁹ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." ⁴⁰ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹ Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; ^[e] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

DRAMATIC READING: Thursday Night | A disciple in the garden of Gethsemane

MIDRASH READER #5 (M5): It all happened so fast.

It was late—later than I had realized, and sleep was clinging to me like a fog I couldn't shake. I heard the crowd arrive in my dreams. At first I thought it was a crowd of people wanting Jesus to heal them. I thought selfishly to myself for just a moment, "How in the world did they find us here?!"

That's when I started to wake up.

I realized the crowd didn't sound right—it wasn't people praising Jesus or begging for mercy. It was too quiet, far too quiet for that; and in the quiet I could hear the clink of swords in sheaths.

I frantically pulled myself from sleep, shaking awake my brothers and trying to stand up quickly.

I saw Judas at the front of the crowd.

"What is he doing there?" I thought.

"Maybe things will be okay after all," I thought.

But I was wrong.

In a split second my whole world fell apart around me.

I went from knowing my way, knowing my purpose, and knowing my plans, to standing in the wilderness alone. It happened as quickly as a summer thunderstorm and as slowly as the change in seasons.

The crowd with clubs and swords were taking Jesus. They were taking him away, and he was not fighting it.

Maybe if I had stayed awake like he had asked then this wouldn't have happened.

Maybe if we had left Jerusalem and gone back to Bethany, this wouldn't have happened.

What am I supposed to tell my family? The man I have seen heal the sick and walk on water has been arrested, and the angels didn't stop it.

Who is this man, you ask?

He's not a criminal. That's for sure.

It all happened so fast.

HYMN | "Stay With Us Through the Night" Sacred Sounds

CLOSING LITANY | "Who is he?"

Who is he?

On Sunday he was everything—the center of the parade, the center of our attention. His arrival was holy and unexpected and beautiful.

On Monday he turned the world upside down. He flipped the tables while he flipped the script.

On Tuesday he was a teacher.. not like the other teachers. He was unorthodox. He was radical. Everybody listened. Many were angered.

On Wednesday a woman gave him everything she had and he, in return, gave her the gift of new life.

On Wednesday he was nothing more than a man worth thirty pieces of silver.

On Thursday he shared bread and wine as a symbolic act of his body broken and his blood shed. He asked his friends and followers to remember him.

And on Thursday he was arrested. He was treated like a convict. On Thursday he was alone as his disciples slept.

Who is he?)

It's the question everyone is asking.

Friends, this is the question of holy week, and it's the question of our entire lives.

In order to answer this question, we have to walk through all of holy week, through the wilderness of betrayal and death, the wilderness of the tomb and surprise endings.

This week we invite you to join us again for our holy week services as we continue to walk through the wilderness of faith—the good days, the bad days, the everyday—step by step.

PRAYERS

Loving God, we thank you for this journey through the wilderness that you have called us to make. We give you thanks for everything you have provided for us during this Lenten time and we thank you in anticipation of your ongoing, loving and comforting support in whatever we face – thank you friendship and love, food and shelter, promise and hope. In thanks for all that we have, we remember those for whom the journey is so full of challenges - .

We pray for those who are sick or lonely; those who are grieving, those struggling with anxiety and depression... for those caught in addiction... for those living in the midst of violence and fear. We pray for everyone who is in need who need comfort and compassion.. who is in need of your hope.

Strengthen us all for the journey ahead; make us faithful companions to one another in this wilderness time. For all that we are and all that we do, we praise you in the words that Jesus taught us.

SUNG CLOSING Love us into Fullness vs 3 – Shirley Blackburn

BLESSING

And so for this final week journeying into the wilderness

Let us be comforted and encouraged by the truth that we do not journey alone...

We are held in the tender and abundant love of God,

Christ is with us, strengthening us for the times of struggle,

and the Spirit is guiding us every step of the way.

Amen.