

# Palm/Passion Sunday



**First Congregational Church of Anoka**

**United Church of Christ**

*an Open and Affirming Congregation*

**March 24, 2024**

This bulletin is designed to assist you as you watch our livestreamed worship service, whether you follow along live or view it at a later time. The stream can be found on our YouTube channel at this location:

<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

Welcome & Announcements

## The Liturgy of the Palms

Scripture - Mark 11:1-10

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" <sup>4</sup> They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup> some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup> They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup> Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

The Church Bell Rings

Hymn of Congregational Adoration

"All Glory, Laud, and Honor" #216

*arranged by Cynthia Dobrinski*

*UCC Anoka Bell Choir, Don Shier, Director; Chad Snelson, Trumpet; and Congregation*

*Don will cue the congregation when it is time to sing!*

All glory, laud, and honor, to you, O Christ, we sing,  
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring!  
The people of the Hebrews with palms adorned your way;  
our praise and prayer and anthems we offer you this day.

O Promised One of Israel, of David's royal line,  
the one called "God's beloved" of flesh and yet divine,  
to you, before your passion, they sang their hymns of praise;  
to you, now high exalted, our melody we raise.

As you received their praises, receive our prayers today,  
whose justice and whose mercy and sovereignty hold sway.  
All glory, laud, and honor to you, O Christ, we sing,  
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring!

\* Opening Psalm and Prayer (parts of Ps. 118)

One: Open for us the gates of righteousness, and help us to enter them, Holy One!

**Many: We give thanks to the Living God!**

One: I thank you that you have answered me and become my salvation;

**Many: this is your doing, O God; it is marvelous in our eyes!**

One: This is the day that the LORD has made;

**Many: let us rejoice and be glad in it!**

One: Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Most High God;

**Many: We bless you from the house of the Holiest.**

One: The Faithful One is God, and she has given us light;

**Many: Bind the festal offering with branches!**

One: Hosanna!

**Many: Hosanna!**

One: Let us pray.

**Many: Gracious One, accept our joy on this day of palms, even as you accept our contrition on this day of passion. For on Palm Sunday we remember how quickly the story transitioned. We remember how "Hosanna" means, "Help! Save us!" And we remember that even as we shout, "Hosanna!" in a joyful tune, that peoples all over the world are shouting, "Hosanna!" in the fuller sense of the phrase. Help us to not just pray for those who are in need, but to always struggle for a just peace across this planet, until all are one in safety, security, health, and wholeness. In Christ's name we pray; amen.**

# The Liturgy of the Passion

Hymn

“Just As I Am” #207 (vv. 1-3)

**Just as I am, without one plea but that your blood was shed for me,  
and that you called inviting me, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

**Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt,  
fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

**Just as I am, you will receive, will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
because your promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

Scripture Reading – Mark 11:15-19

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; <sup>16</sup> and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. <sup>17</sup> He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." <sup>18</sup> And when [the local authorities] heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. <sup>19</sup> And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

A Time for Children (10:30)

Special Music

“When Jesus Wept”

arr. Wagner

*Anoka UCC Bell Choir; Don Shier, Director*

Scripture Reading – Mark 11:27-33

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him <sup>28</sup> and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>30</sup> Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me." <sup>31</sup> They argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' <sup>32</sup> But shall we say, 'Of human origin?'-- they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. <sup>33</sup> So they

answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Homily

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

"O God, How We Have Wandered" #202 (v. 1)

**O God, how we have wandered and hidden from your face;  
in foolishness have squandered your legacy of grace.  
But how, in exile dwelling, we turn with fear and shame,  
as distant but compelling, you call us each by name.**

Scripture Reading - Mark 13:14-19

"But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; <sup>15</sup> the one on the housetop must not go down or enter the house to take anything away; <sup>16</sup> the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. <sup>17</sup> Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! <sup>18</sup> Pray that it may not be in winter. <sup>19</sup> For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be.

Hymn

"O God, How We Have Wandered" #202 (v. 2)

**And now at length discerning the evil that we do,  
by faith we are returning with hope and trust in you.  
In haste you come to meet us, and home rejoicing bring,  
in gladness there to greet us with calf and robe and ring.**

Scripture Reading - Mark 15:1-5

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. <sup>2</sup> Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." <sup>3</sup> Then the chief priests accused him of many things. <sup>4</sup> Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." <sup>5</sup> But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Hymn

"O God, How We Have Wandered" #202 (v. 3)

**O God of all the living, both banished and restored,  
compassionate, forgiving, our peace and hope assured.  
Grant now that our transgressing, our faithlessness may cease.  
Stretch out your hand in blessing, in pardon, and in peace.**

Scripture Reading - Mark 15:21-26

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. <sup>22</sup> Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). <sup>23</sup> And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. <sup>25</sup> It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."

Special Music

“Agnus Dei”

arr. Thoburn

*Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director*

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: miserere nostril.*

*(Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.)*

Prayer of Our Savior (unison)

*The Prayer has many versions; pray whichever you desire (debts, sins, trespasses, etc.).*

*We affirm that God has many names, so use one of the suggested or another of your choosing.*

**Our Father/Mother/Creator, 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, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Benediction

Congregational Blessing

“God Be With You” (#809)

Dorsey/Hutchins

**God be with you. God be with you. God be with you ‘til we meet again.**

**O God be with you. God be with you. God be with you ‘til we meet again.**

Postlude

Koki Sato

Offering (taken up at the exits)

Text-to-Give: [844-334-1477](tel:844-334-1477)

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## Holy Week Schedule

**6:30pm Maundy Thursday – Foot/Handwashing + Communion**

**7:30pm Good Friday – Scripture, Hymns, and Music by Bach, Rachmaninoff, and Shostakovich**

**8:30am/10:30am Easter – Christ is Risen! Come celebrate Koki during Coffee Hour!**

### Sermon Text

Much as we did today, I remember as a child in the church celebrating Palm Sunday with waving palm branches, processions, upbeat music like **“Hosanna, loud hosanna the little children sang.”** It’s a deeply meaningful tradition in the life of the church, a day on which we remember how Jesus entered Jerusalem to the shouts of crowds singing his praises. Or, at least, that’s how tradition tells the story.

On a recent Palm Sunday, I taught you that “Hosanna!” literally means, “Save us, we pray!” That’s what the Church has long papered over on this day of joy: the people appear to have been crying out for liberation. Because of that, with each passing year I find it harder and harder as a pastor and preacher to hold to the traditional joyousness of the day. “Save, us we pray!”

We know what life was like for the Judeans in the first-century. They were a people living under Imperial occupation, and though they were allowed to practice their religion with a certain degree of autonomy within the Roman Empire, that doesn’t mean life was good. They had to pay substantial taxes to Caesar. Centurions were stationed in many places. Pilate was known throughout the region as a vicious and cruel ruler, to the extent that even Caesar ended up having to recall the governor to Rome for disciplinary action. When Jesus got to Jerusalem, the people were aching for salvation. The story we have inherited is that the people knew he was coming. They knew of his exploits, his miracles, his teaching. He was a rabbi of renown, and some people even said he was the Messiah, the long-awaited ruler who would free them from the yoke of Roman oppression. So it was that when he arrived on what we today call the Via Dolorosa, the people cried out, “Save us, we pray!”

Is it possible to hear that cry on Palm Sunday and NOT hear it in the voices of those who are facing Imperial oppression and aggression today? Is it possible to read of this festal procession and not be mindful of the other processions that are happening in our world today? Even as we celebrate with palms and songs today, Palestinians in Gaza are crying out to anyone who will listen, “Save us, we pray!” As we

bind the altar with branches, Israeli hostages are praying and crying out, "Save us, we pray!" As our bells sound with peals of joy, bells toll in grief in Ukraine for the thousands of brave soldiers who have died defending their homeland, their cries melding with the procession of spouses who take the trains out to the front lines to visit their partners. Even at home, we hear, "Save us, we pray!" in the processions of women exiting states where conservative Christian legislatures have forbidden abortion, and by inevitable side-effect, all manner of reproductive health procedures.

Though I have named struggles in several places, it's truly the plight of the Gazan people that grips my heart today. Perhaps it feels far away, but to put it in perspective, the straight-line distance from Anoka to Rochester is 103 miles. From Jerusalem to Rafah, to where two million Gazans have fled in the face of Netanyahu's military campaign? Sixty-three miles. That's roughly the same distance as an afternoon drive from here to IKEA and back.

It grips me as well because I've been there. Not to Gaza, but to Jerusalem. To the Galilee. To the Negev desert and the Red Sea. I was there in the summer of 1995 with my teacher Gordon, the same one I mentioned last week. Before coming to Doane College, he had lived in Israel and taught at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. For a number of years, he'd take student groups over there to experience Israel and Palestine, though not in the typically Western touristy way. When I went, we stayed in a Palestinian hotel in East Jerusalem. We were the guests for an evening of one of his friends, a Palestinian Christian in Jerusalem. We dug for artifacts at Bethsaida on the north side of the Galilee. We explored the desert with Gordon's Israeli friend Sefi whose connections to powerful people in the Israeli government left me breathless. We spent one night as the guests of Sefi's friend Suleiman of the only Bedouin family allowed to live in their ancestral territory because they had helped Prime Minister Golda Meir meet up with King Husayn of Jordan.

As I said, this was in the summer of 1995, which means Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was still alive, and he was talking a lot about vacating Gaza and the West Bank. The whole reason Israel occupied those lands was because of him, after all. He was the hero of Israel who successfully led the military response to invasion. He was even talking about giving the Golan Heights back to Syria. You will recall that it was an Israeli citizen who assassinated him because of his efforts to create peace, and everything since was worse.

That's not to say it wasn't great to begin with. I have rarely been more ill at ease to see how many Israeli citizens openly carried firearms. A sleeping soldier on a bus to Eilat kept dropping his M-16 on the floor; we even had a term for it: "Bang clatter clatter." In the northern part of the country, many times a day we saw military jets and massive cargo planes flying overhead. Soldiers patrolled the streets of the old city, detaining young, Palestinian men and making them face a wall in the hot sun. In the highway that runs the length of the Rift Valley, we were able to pass right on through the checkpoint because we were American, while Palestinian drivers were forced to wait in an enormous line in order to pass. And though we didn't see it, Gordon made sure we were well-versed in the stories of Palestinian families whose ancestral homes were routinely being bulldozed so that more towns could be illegally built in the West Bank.

On Palm Sunday, those are the cries of "Hosanna!" that I hear.

Friends, I don't want you to be mistaken. I'm not remotely anti-Israel. What I am is opposed to the death-dealing policies of the Netanyahu coalition, just as I am against the tactics and acts of Hamas. These are not the actions of the Israeli or Palestinian people, most of whom crave a truly just peace (if perhaps not in the same percentages we saw in 1995; decades of conflict can harden even the most loving of hearts). On this Palm Sunday, I want us to join our own cries to theirs, as we cry out, "Save them, we pray!"

It's not all doom and gloom. Our faith assures us that Easter is coming, that love wins, that God has never and will never abandon us. In fact, in recent days, I have witnessed Good News. For what might be

the very first time in my memory, our government initiated a resolution in the United Nations Security Council calling for an immediate and complete cease-fire. Admittedly, they had vetoed three prior attempts at the same—no one said our national relationship with that region isn't complicated—but this was big news. Unfortunately, because it was a U.S. resolution, both Russia and China vetoed it, but it's still an enormous step toward what I pray will be a lasting and just peace. The blood of innocents cries out to us all from the ground, and our President is responding. Perhaps, on this Palm Sunday, we can dare to dream that the cries of "Hosanna!" will one day soon transform from "Save us, we pray!" to exuberant shouts of praise.

Amen.

◆ **First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka, MN** ◆

1923 Third Avenue, Anoka, MN 55303 ◆ (763) 421-3375

Pastor – Rev. Chris McArdle

Minister of Visitation – Pastor Kelsey Renk

Director of Health Ministries – Jessie Waks, NP

Director of Music Ministries – Don Shier

Keyboardist – Koki Sato

Moderator – Terja Larsen

Website: <http://www.uccanoka.org> ◆ Email: [office@uccanoka.org](mailto:office@uccanoka.org)

Text-to-Give: 844-334-1477



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