



South Elkhorn Christian Church

Digital Liturgy

April 5, 2020

PREPARE

Locate a candle to light and communion elements to use (bread/juice or whatever is available to you).

Find a quiet place by yourself or with others.

Read through the instructions, prayers, scripture, and questions below. You can also find a guided, voice-led version of this digital liturgy at southelkhorncc.org/digital-liturgy

WELCOME THE LIGHT

Welcome to worship with South Elkhorn Christian Church. Light a candle if you are able and receive these words:

CALL TO WORSHIP

Lift your heart in gladness,
Hosanna in the highest!
Lift your soul with praise,
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

CENTERING & LORD'S PRAYER

South Elkhorn Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Let us gather together in prayer in our different living room across Lexington. Let us pray...

Dear God,

Today we wave palm branches, or maybe just the palms of our hands in the air, in your honor, in your glory. And we shout out Hosanna to God, in the Highest. We love this parade as we celebrate your entry into Jerusalem: the crowds of people, singing and dancing and cheering you on. And we want to stay here in the celebration on the streets in this party parade, because we know the story, it's comfortable here, we know what's next and what we are preparing for this week. Because we will go from shouts of Hosanna to shouts of Crucify him.

But remind us we are not there yet. We still want to hold on to this moment right here, right now. So may we spread cloaks on the floors of our homes. And may we raise our palms in the air and welcome you not only into our homes, but into our hearts. And as we continue another week of isolation from each other, may we hold on to that Easter hope there will be a Resurrection. And that we are never, ever isolated from you. You are with us in our darkness. You are with us in the unknown.

Teach us to follow you without fear, listening to your comforting voice to lead us and guide us on this journey together, until we can celebrate as one church family unity in faith under one roof. We look forward to that moment. And we look forward to coming together now, though in different places, but with one voice, to say the prayer you taught us, saying...

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 sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 21:1-11

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 fulfil 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, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’

SERMON

Parades are important.

They mark holidays, religious events, and significant community accomplishments; perhaps you look forward to one each year: The Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, the Rose Parade, Lexington’s Halloween Thriller Parade, Mardi Gras in New Orleans, this year the city of Kansas City threw the Chiefs a Super Bowl champions parade...

I still remember the Fourth of July parade I attended as a child. I loved it because of the costumes, the music, the flags and floats, and the candy that was tossed out... my hands, along with many little hands, darted into the street to scoop up the sugary-delights.

Humans have long been drawn to parades. There is evidence from cave paintings dating back ten thousands years ago that prehistoric humans paraded back from a hunt, carrying and celebrating their game.

In the first century, in the year 71, a celebratory procession, a parade marched through the city of Rome. It was called a triumph. The emperor Vespasian and his son Titus presided as Roman citizens gathered along the streets. The roar and wild cheers were deafening as floats went by. The crowds shouted and waved as people paraded past. The crowds gawked at the mysterious and exotic artifacts on display...

The floats... they weren't giant balloons of cartoon characters or creative settings for musicians to sing and dance... no they were depictions of key engagements in the war with Jerusalem--the war that destroyed the city in the year 70 and in which an estimated 1.1 million people died. The people that walked in that parade, they were Jewish prisoners, rebels and everyday citizens captured by Rome--some executed, others imprisoned for life, still others enslaved to construct the Colosseum, and others made into gladiators to die inside. The artifacts that paraded past the cheering crowd, they were golden relics from the Temple that had been burned and destroyed. Relics that would become wealth for Rome.

And the crowds cheered. They cheered their dominance. They cheered their power. They cheered for fear of the emperor and his soldiers.

These kinds of parades were common in Rome--parades of military power, enslaved peoples, and harvested wealth.

In the years before this triumph, there were parades in Jerusalem. These were parades of the Roman army into the city, to flex the military muscle of Rome before the subjected people of Jerusalem. There were soldiers, weapons, war horses and military commanders. These parades brought a powerful message: if you don't obey and pay, then you might experience the next kind of parade... a parade in which you are the paraded, a conquered, enslaved, resource-stripped people...

Which is what makes the parade we read about in Matthew's gospel so strange.

It was a pop-up parade, perhaps a pleasant surprise as people were going about their day, an interruption of joy that caused people to stop and stare, perhaps gather and look around for what was going on... branches suddenly spread on the road, people walking along cheering, shouts of "Hosanna"... then a man emerges, surrounded by an odd entourage of peasants, sick people, women, children, fishermen, tax collectors, and the like... this strange, gentle man is riding along not on a stallion, but on a donkey, in a swirl of dust and smiles...

Strange. And important.

Important because of its contrast to the parades of the day. Important because of who it included. Important because of what it signaled about true kingship.

In the parade with Jesus is a crowd of every part of society--especially those rejected, humiliated, and scorned. In the parade with Jesus there is no symbol of violent power, no weapons of control, only symbols of humility and instruments of peace. Those who assemble and parade are not prisoners or soldiers on order, but those who are free, who shout with joy freely, who experience the free joy of God's odd and wondrous presence...

It is a strange parade, one that begins a strange week. Holy Week. A week in which Jesus enters Jerusalem, is arrested, crucified as a ridiculed, mocked and impotent "king", and then... well... turns out to be the king of no empire, but of mercy, forgiveness, peace, redemption, grace, restorative justice, transformation, indeed, the king of life itself.

The parade that Jesus leads into Jerusalem is one he resumes on the other side of the cross, out from the tomb, into eternal and abundant life. It is a parade we can join, we can continue, we can extend. It is a parade that includes all people, especially those who are sick, jobless, ignored, weary, grieving, disconnected and discombobulated. It is a parade of people who are nevertheless accepted, nevertheless free: free for joy, free for peace, free to celebrate that nothing can destroy the life of God given to us in Christ.

The odd parades, the one we don't expect, the ones that clash with what we expect of our reality, well... those are the best parades. They are the kind of parades Jesus makes happen. They are festivals of spiritual freedom, everlasting joy, and true peace--the realities that every day and age desperately needs. Including and especially this one.

I can still see the look on the man's face. He came out of his house on the corner of two streets, surprised and shocked, and smiling. He saw the cars that lined up along his road--and the people in costumes, waving signs, blowing bubbles. There was a parade forming outside this man's house, and the parade wasn't for him. The small group of vehicles were about to drive from his home and toward the home of a nearby, South Elkhorn Christian Church youth. The signs read happy birthday, and we love you; and the man shouted to us as we waited for the last of the cars to arrive, "This is awesome, this is just so awesome, thank you, thank you..." The parade hadn't even started, wasn't even for him, but he was participating in the joy, caught up in the celebration, and experiencing the unexpected reality of social connection in a time of social distancing and isolation.

The smiles kept coming. The celebration rolled on. And when the birthday boy saw, to

his great surprise, a parade headed for him, he bounced with joy, bounced and laughed as people from his church waved and sang and smiled and rolled past.

That's the kind of parade Jesus leads--one that challenges what we might expect, turns our expectations upside down with joy-filled life and wide inclusion, and shapes the world anew.

COMMUNION

Place before you bread and a cup of juice (or whatever you have on hand to use). If you are with others, serve one another with the blessing, "The bread of life, the cup of hope."

The Lord be with you,

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

The communion elements before you unite us in Christ's Spirit one to another. Christ's life, death, and resurrection unite us to God's infinite and all-inclusive Love. All are welcome to the Table, and all are invited to remember...

THE BREAD

"The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it..."

Hold the bread and, if possible, break it.

"...and said, 'This is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.'"

THE CUP

Hold the cup. If you have not already, pour juice (or whatever you have on hand) into the cup.

"After supper, Jesus took the cup saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'"

PRAYER

Gracious and Loving God, You have made us for connection. In this time of separation and isolation send to us your Spirit. That we might experience your sustaining presence and be encouraged with hope through the fellowship of your love. Amen.

Receive and prayerfully enjoy the bread and the cup.

GENEROSITY

Prayerfully consider someone to reach out to with a word of love, encouragement, or prayer. Write a card. Make a phone call. Or identify a time to do so today (or in the week ahead).

Tithes and offerings can be mailed to South Elkhorn or you can give online at

southelkhorncc.org/give

CHANGING THE LIGHT

Now it is time to change the light. The light that was in one place at one time, is now in all places at all times.

In this very room and everywhere we go. And all God's children said, Amen.

Extinguish the candle and watch the smoke rise.

UPDATES

Visit southelkhorncc.org/blog to learn the latest on worship, building usage, and more.

Digital Worship & Wonder videos available at southelkhorncc.org/worship-wonder.

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@southelk to the number 81010