

ORDER OF WORSHIP

April 5, 2020
Palm Sunday
Second Congregational Church in Wilton,
United Church of Christ

**WELCOME to the worship of God at the
Second Congregational Church in Wilton, United Church of Christ.
We are glad you are here today!**

***Bold print means congregational participation.
An asterisk (*) indicates to please stand, if you are able.***

GATHERING FOR THE WORD

WORDS OF WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

*CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Lent began in the wilderness; it concludes in Jerusalem.

All: **We now come near to the end of one story. Another will soon begin.**
We have followed Jesus this far; today we remember how he faced betrayal,
falseness, rejection, and torment.
**And we witness, once more, that he taught
and walked in love through every step of the journey.**

MATTHEW 21: 1-17

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE

Narrator (Reader 1) As they approached Jerusalem, entering Beth-Phage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent off two disciples with the instructions,

Jesus (Reader 2) “Go into the village straight ahead of you, and immediately you will find a tethered donkey with her colt standing beside her. Untie them and lead them back to me. If anyone questions you, say, ‘The Rabbi needs them.’ Then they will let them go at once.”

Narrator (Reader 3) This came about to fulfill what was said through the prophet: “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Your Sovereign comes to you without display, riding on a donkey, on a colt— the foal of a beast of burden.’ ” So the disciples went off and did what Jesus had ordered. They brought the donkey and her colt, and after they laid their cloaks on the animals, Jesus mounted and rode toward the city.

THE PROCESSION OF PALMS

Narrator (reader 1) Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while some began to cut branches from the trees and lay them along the path. The crowds—those who went in front of Jesus and those who followed—were all shouting

Crowd “Hosanna to the Heir to the House of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Most High! Hosanna in the highest!”

Narrator (Reader 2) As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred to its depths, demanding, “Who is this?” And the crowd kept answering,

Crowd (Congregation) “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee!”

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Narrator (Reader 3) When Jesus entered the Temple, he drove out all those who were selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves. He said to them,

Jesus (Reader 1) “Scripture says, ‘My house is called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of thieves!”

Narrator (Reader 2) Those who were blind or couldn’t walk came to him in the Temple, and he healed them. When the chief priests and teachers of the Law saw the wonderful things Jesus did throughout the Temple area, especially when they heard the children shouting:

Crowd “Hosanna to the Heir to the House of David!”

Narrator (Reader 3) They asked him: “Do you hear what the children are shouting?”

Jesus (Reader 3) “Yes! Have you never read, ‘From the mouths of children and nursing babies, you have brought forth praise?’”

Narrator (Reader 1) After leaving them, Jesus went out to Bethany to spend the night. for all who long for you. One breath from you and we are rescue from the arid valley of dry bones, given muscles and sinews and joy with which to praise you, and filled with the holy hope you grant to all your faithful children. Let our whole lives be filled with the life-breath of the Spirit, that what has lain dormant may burst into bloom, and what looks to us to be death may be revealed as but sleep

ENGAGING THE WORD

READING FROM SCRIPTURE

Matthew 21: 1-11

SERMON

“Open The Gate!”

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

PASTORAL PRAYER, SILENT PRAYER

THE 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 trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass 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.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

INVITATION TO SHARE OUR TITHES AND OFFERINGS

*DOXOLOGY Tune: OLD HUNDREDTH

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God above, ye heavenly host;
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

*CALL TO OFFERING

OFFERTORY PRAYER *unison*

We cast these gifts before you, O God,
as palms were cast before Jesus long ago.
We lay them on your altar in praise, thanksgiving, and joy.
Receive them back from our hands,
that they may become a greater blessing in your hands.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE PASSION ACCORDING TO ST MATTHEW

MATTHEW 26:1- 28:20

CONSPIRACY AGAINST JESUS BEGINS

Narrator (Reader 1) Jesus told the disciples, "Passover starts in two days, and the Chosen One will be handed over to be crucified." Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas. They planned to arrest Jesus under some pretext and execute him— "But not during the Festival," they agreed, "or we might have a riot on our hands."

ANOINTING AT BETHANY

Narrator (Reader 2) Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the house of Simon, who had leprosy, a woman approached Jesus with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment. She poured it on his head while he reclined at the table. The disciples, witnessing this, were indignant.

Disciples (All) "What a waste!" "This could have been sold at a high price, and the money given to needier people."

Jesus (Reader 3) Jesus, aware of their concern, said, "Why do you upset the woman? She has done me a good deed. You'll always have poor people with you, but you won't always have me. When she poured the oil on my body, she was preparing me for burial. The truth is, wherever the Good News is proclaimed in the world, she will be remembered for what she has done for me."

CONSPIRACY CONTINUES

Narrator (Reader 1) One of the Twelve, the one named Judas Iscariot, went off to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand Jesus over to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

THE PASSOVER MEAL

Narrator (Reader 2) On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came up to Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover for you?" Jesus told them to go to a certain person in the city and say,

Jesus (Reader 3) "The Teacher says, 'My appointed time draws near. I am to celebrate the Passover in your house.'"

Narrator (Reader 1) The disciples did as Jesus ordered and prepared the Passover supper. When it grew dark, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating he said,

Jesus (Reader 2) "The truth is, one of you is about to betray me."

Narrator (Reader 3) They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, "Surely, it is not I, Teacher?" Jesus replied,

Jesus (Reader 1) "The one who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will hand me over. The Chosen One will go as the scriptures foretold—but woe to the one by whom the Chosen One is betrayed! It would be better for that one never to have been born at all."

Narrator (Reader 2) Then Judas, who was betraying Jesus, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered,

Jesus (Reader 3) “You have said it yourself.”

Narrator (Reader 1) Then, after singing a hymn, they walked out to the Mount of Olives.

HYMN

JOURNEY TO GETHSEMANE

VERSE 1

Journey to Gethsemane,
Go and feel the tempter’s power;
Your redeemer’s conflict see;
Watch the anguish of this hour;
Do not hide or turn away;
Learn from Jesus how to pray.

PETER PROMISES FAITHFULNESS

Jesus (Reader 2) Jesus then said to them, “Tonight you will all fall away because of me, for scripture says, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go to Galilee ahead of you.”

Narrator (Reader 3) Peter responded, “Though all may fall away because of you, I never will!” Jesus replied,

Jesus (Reader 1) “The truth is, before the cock crows tonight, you will deny me three times.”

Narrator (Reader 2) Peter said, “Even if I must die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same. Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane and said to the disciples,

JESUS PRAYS, AND THE DISCIPLES SLEEP

Jesus (Reader 3) “Stay here while I go over there and pray.” Jesus took along Peter, James and John and started to feel grief and anguish. Then he said to them,

Jesus (Reader 1) “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death. Please, stay here, and stay awake with me.” Jesus went on a little further and fell prostrate in prayer: “Abba, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. But not what I want—what you want.”

Narrator (Reader 2) When Jesus returned to the disciples, he found them asleep. He said to Peter,

Jesus (Reader 3) “Couldn’t you stay awake with me for even an hour? Be on guard, and pray that you may not undergo trial. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” Withdrawing a second time, Jesus prayed, “Abba, if this cup cannot pass me by without my drinking it, your will be done!”

Narrator (Reader 1) Once more Jesus returned and found the disciples asleep; they could not keep their eyes open. Jesus left them again, withdrew somewhat and prayed for a third time, saying the same words as before. Finally Jesus returned to the disciples and said to them,

Jesus (Reader 2) “Are you still sleeping? Still taking your rest? The hour is upon us—the Chosen One is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us be on our way! Look, my betrayer is here.”

BETRAYAL AND ARREST

Narrator (Reader 3) While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived—accompanied by a great crowd with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. Judas had arranged to give them a signal. “Whomever I embrace is the one,” he had said; “take hold of him.” He immediately went over to Jesus and said, “Shalom, Rabbi!” and embraced him. Jesus said to Judas,

Jesus (Reader 1) “Friend, just do what you’re here to do!”

Narrator (Reader 2) At that moment, the crowd surrounded them, laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those who accompanied Jesus drew a sword and slashed at the high priest's attendant, cutting off an ear. Jesus said,

Jesus (Reader 3) "Put your sword back where it belongs. Those who live by the sword die by the sword. Don't you think I can call on my Abba God to provide over twelve legions of angels at a moment's notice? But then how would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen this way?" Am I a robber, that you have come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Every day I sat teaching in the Temple precincts, yet you never arrested me."

Narrator (Reader 1) All this happened in fulfillment of the writings of the prophets. Then all the disciples deserted Jesus and fled.

JESUS BEFORE CAIAPHAS

Narrator (Reader 2) Those who had seized Jesus led him off to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the religious scholars and elders had convened. Peter followed at a distance as far as the high priest's residence. Going inside, Peter sat down with the guards to await the outcome. The chief priests, with the whole Sanhedrin, were busy trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. They discovered none, despite the many false witnesses who took the stand.

Narrator (Reader 3) Finally two came forward who stated, "This man has declared, 'I can destroy God's sanctuary and rebuild it in three days.'" The high priest rose and addressed Jesus, "Have you no answer? What about this testimony leveled against you?" But Jesus remained silent. The high priest then said to him, "I order you to tell us under oath, before the living God, whether or not you are the Messiah, the Firstborn of God?" Jesus replied,

Jesus (Reader 1) "You have said it yourself. But I tell you: soon you will see the Chosen One seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Narrator (Reader 2) At this, the high priest tore his robes and said, "Blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? You yourselves have heard the blasphemy. What is your verdict?" They responded, "He deserves death!" Then they spat at his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped Jesus, saying, "Play the prophet for us, Messiah! Who struck you?"

PETER DENIES JESUS

Narrator (Reader 3) While this was happening, Peter was sitting in the courtyard. One of the attendants came over and said, "You were with Jesus the Galilean too, weren't you?" But Peter denied it in front of everyone. He said, "I don't know what you're talking about!" When Peter went out to the gate, another attendant saw him and said to those nearby, "This one was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again he cursed and denied it: "I don't know him!"

Narrator (Reader 1) A little while later, some bystanders came over to Peter and said, "You certainly are one of them! Even your accent gives you away!" At that, Peter began cursing and swore, "I don't know the man!" Just then a rooster began to crow, and Peter remembered the prediction Jesus had made: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." Peter went out and cried bitterly.

JESUS SENT TO PILATE; JUDAS DESPAIRS

Narrator (Reader 2) At daybreak, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took formal action against Jesus to put him to death. They bound him and led him away to be handed over to Pilate, the governor.

Narrator (Reader 3) When he saw that Jesus had been condemned, Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, felt remorse. He took the thirty pieces of silver back to the chief priests and elders,

and said, "I have sinned! I have betrayed innocent blood!" "What's that to us?" they answered. "That's your affair!" So Judas flung the money into the sanctuary and left. Then he went off and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the silver, observing, "It's against the Law to deposit this in the Temple treasury, since it is blood money." After some discussion, they used the money to buy Potter's Field as a cemetery for foreigners. That is why that field, even today, is called Blood Field.

HYMN

Journey to Gethsemane

VERSE 2-TNCH 219

Follow then to Pilate's hall,
View the Lord of life arraigned;
Crowned with thorns and mocked by all,
Faithfully this pain sustained.
Greater still than shame, or loss;
Jesus now must face the cross.

Narrator (Reader 1) Then Jesus was arraigned before Pontius Pilate, the governor, who questioned him. "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied,

Jesus (Reader 2) "You say that I am."

Narrator (Reader 3) Yet when Jesus was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no reply. Pilate said to Jesus, "Surely you hear how many charges they bring against you?" But Jesus did not answer Pilate on a single count, much to the governor's surprise.

Narrator (Reader 1) Now, on the occasion of a festival, the governor was accustomed to release one prisoner, whomever the crowd would designate. At the time they were holding a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. So when the crowd gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you wish me to release for you? Barabbas? Or Jesus, the so-called Messiah?" Pilate knew, of course, that it was out of jealousy that they had handed Jesus over. While Pilate was still presiding on the bench, his wife sent him a message:

Pilate's Wife (Reader 2) "Have nothing to do with that innocent man. I had a dream about him last night which has been troubling me all day long."

Narrator (Reader 3) But the chief priests and elders convinced the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and have Jesus put to death. So when the governor asked them, "Which one do you wish me to release for you?" they all cried,

Crowd "Barabbas!"

Pilate (Reader 3) Pilate said to them, "Then what am I to do with Jesus, the so-called Messiah?"

Crowd "Crucify him!"

Pilate (Reader 1) "Why? What crime has he committed?" Pilate asked.

But they only shouted louder,

Crowd "Crucify him!"

Narrator (Reader 2) Pilate finally realized that he was getting nowhere with this—in fact, a riot was breaking out. Pilate called for water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, declaring as he did so, "I am innocent of this man's blood. The responsibility is yours." The whole crowd said in reply, "Let his blood be on us and on our children." At that, Pilate released Barabbas to them.

JESUS HUMILIATED, AND TAKEN TO THE PLACE OF CRUCIFIXION

Narrator (Reader 3) Pilate had Jesus whipped with a cat-o'-nine-tails, then handed him over to be crucified. The governor's soldiers took Jesus inside the Praetorium and assembled the whole cohort around him. They stripped off his clothes and wrapped him in a scarlet military cloak. Weaving a crown out of thorns, they pressed it onto his head and stuck a reed in his right hand. Then they began to mock Jesus by dropping to their knees, saying, "All hail, King of the Jews!" They also spat at him. Afterward they took hold of the reed and struck Jesus on the head.

Narrator (Reader 1) Finally, when they had finished mocking him, they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes and led him off to crucifixion. On their way out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon, whom they pressed into service to carry the cross. Upon arriving at a site called Golgotha—which means Skull Place—they gave Jesus a drink of wine mixed with a narcotic herb, which Jesus tasted but refused to drink. Once they had nailed Jesus to the cross, they divided his clothes among them by rolling dice; then they sat down and kept watch over him. Above his head, they put the charge against him in writing: “This is Jesus, King of the Jews.”

THE CROSS

Narrator (Reader 2) Two robbers were crucified along with Jesus, one at his right and one at his left. People going by insulted Jesus, shaking their heads and saying,

Crowd “So you are the one who was going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Save yourself, why don’t you? Come down off that cross if you are God’s Own!”

The religious authorities also joined in the jeering:

Crowd “He saved others but he cannot save himself! So he’s the King of Israel! Let’s see him come down from that cross, and then we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God rescue him now! after all, he claimed to be God’s Own!”

The robbers who had been crucified with Jesus jeered at him in the same way.

JESUS DIES

Narrator (Reader 3) At noon, a darkness fell over the whole land until about three in the afternoon. At that hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice,

Jesus (Reader 1) “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Narrator (Reader 2) This made some of the bystanders who heard it remark, “He is calling for Elijah!” One of them hurried off and got a sponge. He soaked the sponge in cheap wine and, sticking it on a reed, tried to make Jesus drink. The others said, “Leave him alone. Let’s see whether Elijah comes to his rescue.”

Narrator (Reader 3) Once again, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, then he gave up his spirit.

*SILENT PRAYER

HYMN

What Wondrous Love is This?

Verse 1—TNCH 223

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this that Christ should come in bliss
to bear the heavy cross for my soul, for my soul,
to bear the heavy cross, for my soul!

Narrator (Reader 1) Suddenly, the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies was ripped in half from top to bottom. The earth quaked, boulders were split and tombs were opened. Many bodies of holy ones who had fallen asleep were raised. After Jesus’ resurrection, they came out of their tombs and entered the holy city, and appeared to many.

Narrator (Reader 2) The centurion and his cohort, who were standing guard over Jesus’ body, were terror-stricken at seeing the earthquake and all that was happening, and said, “Clearly, this was God’s own!”

Narrator (Reader 3) A group of women were present, looking on from a distance. These were the same women who had followed Jesus from Galilee as ministers to him. Among them were Mary of Magdala; Mary, the mother of James and Joseph; and the mother of Zebedee’s children.

BURIAL

Narrator (Reader 1) When evening fell, a wealthy man from Arimathea named Joseph, who had become a disciple of Jesus, to request the body of Jesus; Pilate issued an order for its release. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in fresh linen and laid it in his own tomb, which had been hewn out of rock. Then Joseph rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away.

But Mary of Magdala and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb.

A ROMAN GUARD POSTED

Narrator (Reader 2) The next day—the one following the day of Preparation—the chief priests and the Pharisees called at Pilate’s residence and said, “We recall that, while he was still alive, the impostor made the claim, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore, please issue an order to keep the tomb under surveillance until the third day. Otherwise, Jesus’ disciples might go and steal his body and tell the people, ‘Jesus has been raised from the dead!’ This final deception would be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard. Go and secure the tomb as best you can.” So they went to seal the tomb and post a guard.

The congregation reflects in silence.

Closing Music

PARTICIPATING IN TODAY’S SERVICE

Pastor Kerry Richardson (Interim Pastor)

All the Congregation, Ministers to the World

A WARM WELCOME TO ALL GUESTS! If you are visiting us, we offer you a special welcome and invite you to stay for refreshments in the Parish Hall after worship. We would love to have you join us! Please sign our visitor’s book, and if you are seeking a place to live out your faith, would like more information about this community of faith, or want to talk with someone about who we are and what we do, please speak with Pastor Kerry or one of the Deacons.



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