

March 29, 2026 - Palm Sunday & Liturgy of the Passion

Procession of the Palms & Ministry of Music Hosanna

Welcome & Announcements

Creation Connection In our Palm Sunday readings, how Jesus is treated by different individuals and crowds echoes how humanity at times treats the natural world: with celebration, support, concern, disrespect, abandonment, or destruction.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

L: We light this candle to remind ourselves of the light of Christ that is within and among us.

The candle is lit.

All: Praise be to God, who spoke Light into the world, who sends Light to live among us, who brings the Light of new dawns. Amen!

Prayer for Illumination Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find wisdom, and in your will discover your peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Gathering Hymn Open My Eyes, That I May See, VU # 371

Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.

Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit
divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear;
and while the wave notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.

Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit
divine!

Open my mouth and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere;
open my heart and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.

Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit
divine!

Call to Worship

L: Lord, we are entering Holy Week

P: Our hearts are heavy and we look forward to the week ahead with trepidation.

L: You have told the disciples, and us, what must happen

P: About the terrible choice which you have taken on our behalf

L: We come before you today, humbled and knowing our unworth

P: But knowing that You have chosen this difficult path out of Your unconditional love for us,

L: A Love so profound that You will give Your very all

P: And yet, as painful as it is, You will be torn asunder from Your human self,

All: Leaving Your divine and holy spirit to live on, to conquer death, and to promise eternal life. Let us worship God!

Welcoming of new members Today, we welcome as new members to Dunwich United Church: Denise Noddin & Stacia Lett

L: Do you believe in the Holy Trinity, God our parent, Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, around and within us?

Denise & Stacia: We do, God being our helper.

L: Have you studied, and are you prepared to follow the faith statements and beliefs of the United Church of Canada?

Denise & Stacia: Yes, we have studied these texts and promise to further our education in learning about our church.

L: In the name of God the Father, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, we welcome you into this congregation, asking you to faithfully and with great dedication join the Congregation of Dunwich United Church. Do you promise, before God and all of those gathered here, to do so?

Denise & Stacia: We do, God being our helper.

The congregation is invited to stand as they are able

L: Congregation and adherents of Dunwich UC, do you vow to welcome, support, and extend the hand of friendship to our new members, helping them continue their journey as believers in Christ within our ranks?

P: We promise to do so, God being our helper.

L: Blessed be God for his tender mercies, and for this celebration of union and joined pathways this day! Let us now welcome our now fellow congregants, with our hands and hearts, now and always.

Prayer Sweet Lord, we are filled with joy today as we extend the fellowship and membership of Your church Dunwich United through the additions of these faithful and special people who have been worshipping with us, and who have now

joined our family. We thank you for their presence, their desire to worship with us, and that we all, today, recommit our promises to serve and worship You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Official Welcoming Council Chair Jackie Littlejohn & Rev Larry Schneider extend their hands in welcome, and present Certificates of Membership to Denise Noddin & Stacia Lett

Children's Ministry *The Purpose of Palms?*

The Lord's Prayer(spoken)
Children leave for Sunday School

Hymn **My Faith Looks Up to Thee**, VU # 663

My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour Divine!
Now hear me while I pray,
take all my guilt away,
O, let me from this day,
be wholly Thine!

While life's dark maze I tread,
And griefs around me spread,
be Thou, my Guide;
Bid darkness turn to day,
wipe sorrow's tears away,
Nor let me ever stray
from Thee aside.

May Thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire!
As Thou hast died for me,
O may my love to Thee,
Pure warm, and changeless be,
A living fire.

Offering Invitation & Prayer We hear of a king riding on a donkey. Ridiculous! Jesus' life and death are a story of paradox. Our God knows suffering and ridicule, and instead of vengeance, invites us to love. Commands us to share. Implores us to seek justice and dignity for all. Through our gifts, this community of faith and The United Church of Canada, through Mission and Service, are doing just that. Seeking to transform lives, inspire meaning, and build a better world. Please give generously!

God of equality, your call to be counter-cultural has not changed, so it was with Jesus atop a donkey, it is today. Help us start with ourselves, sharing our abundance and praying for a world where power is shared, not wielded. From time to time we will wave palms or placards, with your presence in our lives a reminder. Bless the monies received today and at other times through PAR and online, and may these gifts be part of your kin(g)dom revolution. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Responsive Psalm 31, VU # 758

L: In you, O God, I have taken refuge, let me never be put to shame.

P: **Deliver me in your righteousness, incline your ear, come quickly to my rescue.**

L: Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to keep me safe.

P: **You are indeed my rock and fortress, lead me and guide me for Your own name's sake.**

L: Release me from the net that they hid for me, for you are my protector.

P: **Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O God of truth.**

L: Have mercy on me, O God, for I am in trouble, my eyes are wasted with grief, my soul and my body also.

P: **My life is worn out with sorrow, and my years with sighing, my strength fails me in my misery, my bones are wasted away.**

L: I am the scorn of my enemies, yes, even of my neighbours.

P: **My acquaintances shudder at the sight of me, when they see me in the street, they shrink away.**

L: I have passed out of mind like one who is dead, I have become like a broken vessel.

P: **I hear the whispering of many, fear is on every side, while they conspire against me, and plot to take my life.**

L: My times are in your hands, deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.

P: **Let your face shine on your servant, and save me, for your mercy's sake.**

Philippians 2: 5-12

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

Matthew 26: 14-27

Then one of the Twelve - the one called Judas Iscariot - went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "You have said so." While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."

Hymn Ride On, Ride On, in Majesty, VU # 127

Ride on, ride on, in majesty! Hark! All the tribes, hosanna cry: O Saviour meek, pursue Thy road, With palms and scattered garments strowed.	Ride on, ride on, in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin O'er captive death and conquered sin.	Ride on, ride on, in majesty! The winged squadrons of the sky look down with sad and wondering eyes, To see the approaching sacrifice.	Ride on, ride on, in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain. Then take, O God, Thy power and reign.
--	---	--	---

Message From Palms to the Passionate Farewells

On Palm, or Passion Sunday, we reflect on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, a moment of both triumph and foreshadowing, as we prepare to walk with him through the events of Holy Week, culminating in his crucifixion and resurrection. As we move towards the end of Lent, our focus turns to the cross.

This is an important day in the church calendar. It emphasises an aspect of God we tend to forget. We usually imagine God has been up there in high heaven, remote from pain in his divine glory. When in trouble we tend to ask:- "Where is God, why doesn't he come to help us?" Well, Patri-Passion Sunday means that though we cannot see Him or feel His presence He is with us and sharing our suffering. The Bible has many such assurances (**Psalm 46**) and this is our ultimate comfort and strength.

Trouble is thought to be the biggest obstacle to Faith but it may be its greatest asset. Success often drives people away from God and can make us arrogant and egotistical. Suffering, in all its forms, may cause us to look beyond ourselves for help and make us aware that God may be more real in the darkness that He is in the light. (**Psalm 139**: 1-12)

We can learn many valuable lessons in suffering. Failure and loss may prompt us to take another look at values and lifestyles, showing us that we may have been foolish in our behaviour. Pride is said to be the cardinal sin and trouble can make us more humble and realistic. Pain in body or mind can help us be more sympathetic with others and give us insights that are valuable and helpful. We can reach a fellow sufferer more deeply if we can say:- "I know what you are going through, I've been there".

When the Bible tells us that:- "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself", it means that God WAS with Jesus on the cross, though in his pain he felt he was forsaken by his Father and asked why?

Suffering can distort our perception of what is really happening and so faith is essential. The Good news is that God IS with us in our distresses, wants to help us bear the pain and find the best solutions to our problems.

Once a young farm boy lived on the outskirts of town. He was coming home from school one day and saw some men putting up a poster on a fence. He hung around until they finished, and then he went over to read it. It told of a real live circus coming to town; one that had animals and everything!

The boy rushed home and told his father and asked if he could go. The father knew they didn't have any money, but told the boy he could go anyway. Come the day of the circus, the boy hurriedly finished all his chores and then changed clothes. Then he went to his father and asked if he could go. His father smiled and handed him a dollar. That was money than the boy had ever seen before. His father told him to have a good time and to be careful. Off the boy ran.

When he got to town, he saw the whole town standing on either side of the road, and then he heard the noises. Here came the circus! His heart raced and his eyes got big as the band played their instruments as they walked past him on the road. Next, came some animals in cages. He was sacred, but he stood his ground. How exciting this was! Then, group after group, all kinds of neat people and things came by. This lasted for the longest time, and then, at the very end was a clown, all by himself. He had the traditional clown garb on, complete with painted face and big floppy shoes.

When the boy saw the clown, he ran to him and gave him the dollar. Then the boy went home satisfied. He only saw the parade and thought it was the circus. And that is how many Christians view the Easter week. They see the celebration in

the first part, and they see the miracle of ascension in the last part, but they miss the passion of the cross in the middle; yet they think they have seen it all, and they think they are satisfied.

I knew people in school who would read only the first and last chapters in a book and then try and give a book report on it. Oh, we know full well everything that happened in the beginning and the end, but we miss out on all the important information in the middle.

I have made a conscious, fairly difficult decision to preach about "Passion Sunday," a very different story from our usual focus on the parade of the palms which joyously opens Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. By focusing on Jesus passion and his farewells to his disciples, I have to tell you that this parade was really a funeral procession. This day marked the beginning of the end; the week of betrayal; and the week that would end in suffering and death.

For, as we read in Philippians, Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Jesus loved us so much that he became like one of us, giving his life in our stead, or place. This is what we must celebrate, that even though the people of Jerusalem who cheered Jesus on his entry totally misunderstood his true purpose, we too will end up celebrating on Easter Sunday, as the greatest miracle of all time occurs, for us. Jesus prefigures this by teaching his disciples the sacrament of Holy Communion, which we too celebrated a few weeks ago, in preparing ourselves for this difficult week. On Good Friday we come to the cross, and our task is to reinterpret what Jesus boundless love and sacrifice means to us each, as individuals. Praise be to God and to His Son. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Concern Loving Creator God, we thank you for life and its quality in a time and place where suffering, loss and death seem to predominate the news, the media, and our conversations. Too often we focus on the calamity of badly-behaving leaders, violence and war, which we hoped would have been banished by the year of our Lord 2026. We live a relatively sheltered existence here in Southwestern Ontario, with an abundance of fresh water and nourishment for most, but certainly not all, of us. Today we send aloft our prayers for all who suffer, who have lost loved ones or their own abilities and have fallen into despair. Today's scriptures, and Jesus revealing how much He truly loves humanity, as represented as weak by his tears for his friend Lazarus, and this week returning to Jerusalem for what He knows is the final time, promises our redemption and everlasting life. Jesus weeps, as evil and violence cause so much harm, and it is in His love for us that we can find comfort. Despite the darkness of the past months, the short days and the terribly long nights, spring and all of the renewal and new life which it promises, and delivers, is bursting forth all around us, and at Easter, within us. During these Lenten days let us be truly repentant, humbling and confessing to our Maker that which we have done, and that which we have failed to do. The earlier sunrises symbolize, for we Christians, the rising of the Son, today prefigured in celebrations as Jesus enters the city, shouts of joy by people whose support will turn out to fleeting at best, and two-faced at worst.

Be with us, comfort us, inspire and refresh us, as we continue our journeys, sojourners striving to become more Christ-like, each sleep, followed by each new awakening as the Son rises, being an opportunity to be grateful to God, to celebrate the abundance of our lives, and to reach out to others in the response to the scarcity being experienced by far too many. For they will know that we are Christians by our love. Amen.

Parting Hymn *Called By Earth and Sky*, MVU # 135

Refrain	Precious these waters,	Precious this gift	Precious these mountains,
Called by earth and sky,	endless seas,	the air we breathe,	ancient sands,
promise of hope held high.	Deep ocean's dream,	wind born and free.	vast fragile land.
This is our sacred living trust,	Waters of healing,	breath of the Spirit	Seeds of our wakening
Treasure of life sanctified,	Rivers of rain,	blow through this place	rooted and strong
Called by earth and sky.	the wash of love again.	Our gathering and our grace.	Creation's faithful song.
	Refrain	Refrain	Refrain

Commissioning & Benediction The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. May the Peace of our Lord be with you all of your waking and sleeping moments. Amen.

Choral Doxology

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Choral Amen