

MIND SET

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

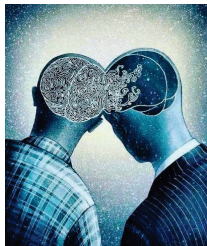
March 29, 2026
Palm Sunday

Matthew 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem, entering Beth-Phage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent off two disciples with the instructions, "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 you go at once." 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 with Jesus had ordered. They brought the donkey and her colt, and after they laid their cloaks on the animal, Jesus unmounted and rode toward the city. 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, "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!" As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred to its depth, demanding, "Who is this?" And the crowd kept answering, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee!"

Philippians 2:5-11

Your attitude must be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Christ, though in the image of God, didn't deem equality with God something to be clung to - but instead became completely empty and took on the image of oppressed humankind: born into the human condition, found in the likeness of a human being. Jesus was thus humbled - obediently accepting death, even death on a cross! Because of this, God highly exalted Christ and gave to Jesus the name above every other name, so that at that the name of Jesus every knee must spend in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God: Jesus Christ reigns supreme!



This is not my first guitar. I got this guitar about 30 years ago. It's actually the fourth guitar that I've owned. It was a little bit more than 42 years ago that my cousin gave me an old guitar they weren't using. It was a Sears Silverton Tone. It was missing a couple of strings, but you know, I went and got strings and put them on it because I wanted to learn how to play guitar. I didn't realize that the Sears Silvertone was a classical style guitar, so I just put good old western strings on it. You know, good steel wound strings. I probably wrecked this guitar. It didn't start with me, but I didn't help it at all. The neck was actually coming away from the body. It probably had a good 3/4 of an inch at the bottom there. And so the action, which is the distance between the strings and the fretboard, was a little high on this guitar, which meant that if you tried to play anything, it usually sounded like *this*. But, you know, you could learn. And I got really good at pushing my fingers down hard in

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

order to make any sound at all because the action was so high. That was New Year's Day 1984. I had just been appointed to the government cabinet of the Alberta Youth Parliament, then known as the Tuxis Parliament of Alberta that still had some religious connections as part of its history. I had been appointed to the government cabinet as the Minister of Devotions. It was my job to plan and lead simple devotional or worship services at the various conferences we held throughout the year. It would be my job to work with others to come up with a theme and a theme speaker for the main parliamentary session which always happened between Boxing Day and New Year's Eve. Now 40 some years ago there was no YouTube, there was no internet; so I couldn't learn from watching really skilled people on my phone or my computer. I got myself a chord book which had pictures of where to put your fingers and what the chords should look like *and* I watched others play.

My deputy minister the deputy minister of devotions was an excellent acoustic guitar player. Played a 12 string and I love that sound which is why I gravitated to 12 strings when I got my third guitar, Jasmine Takanimi's predecessor. I learned by asking him questions and watching his fingers. And I had a little bit of music theory from my high school music days. And I remember at one point thinking, I wonder how you play a D minor? And but I had enough music theory to know, well, I know how to play a D major, and I know that to make it a minor, I need to take that third of the chord, which in that case is an F sharp, and make it an F natural. And then I thought, well, if I was going to do this, maybe if I did this, the fingering would be a little different. And I remember calling my friend up and saying, "Is this where you put your fingers for a D minor?" And he said, "That's exactly where you put your fingers for a D minor." And I thought to myself, I am so smart. I figured out how to play a guitar chord that I didn't know. By this point, I had graduated to my first guitar that was strung properly, a red bodied Mann guitar. That summer I took old red to summer camp where at the time there were a few experienced guitar players playing and I just watched and I did my best to keep up. I tried to volunteer most weeks that summer and by the end of the summer by some miracle of fate I had a number of chords committed to memory and I could even occasionally move from one chord to another relatively close to the time that it was supposed to happen. I even had a couple of basic strumming patterns down. I mean, I had the basic fourbeat strumming pattern that every guitarist learns whether they know it or not. The down, down, up, up, down, up. And I use that all the time. I was using it earlier today. Basic four beat strumming. I loved that learning music at a campfire was not a stressful gig. That we accepted players for who they were. We were grateful that people wanted to learn and the goal was to mostly just kind of start and end together, right? And if we were a little bit out of tune with the person beside us and we didn't have time to really get in tune with each other, then it would be just... well, you go to that side of the campfire and I'll go to this side of the campfire and no one will know anyway. There was this attitudinal unity that was far more important than every note being perfect and in sync. And what a wonderful model that has been for my life.

I learned to play guitar four decades ago by watching and trying to copy other people who had learned to play guitar before me. Some of them learned the very same way. Some of them took formal lessons. But I learned based on what other people had already figured out.

Jesus and a group of his followers made a Passover pilgrimage from Capernaum down to Jerusalem. They likely arrived sometime on the Friday or earlier. Certainly, they wouldn't have traveled on the Sabbath day, the Saturday before the Passover. They probably when they got there on Friday or earlier and set up camp just outside the city on what was known as the Olive Hill or the Olive Mountain. There were two villages that were on the Olive Mountain at the time Bethany and Bethpage. Bethany, as we heard last week from the story of Lazarus and Martha and Mary, was where they lived and a place that Jesus visited frequently. So Jesus makes his camp either with his friends at his friend's place or somewhere up on the hill with other Galilean pilgrims. And it was after that Sabbath day on the first day of a new week that Jesus and company walked down the

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

small Mount of Olives to go into Jerusalem excited for the week leading up to the Passover and all of the ceremonies and events that would be happening. Now along the way they borrowed a donkey for Jesus to ride and as we heard in today's reading in Matthew which is written by the mid70s. This action was already interpreted in those early decades after it happened as being a living out of Zechariah 9. *Your sovereign comes to you humble and riding on a donkey.* And the impromptu parade drew a crowd perhaps hyped up by Jesus disciples and it led to another mid70s interpretation that this was a reminder of Psalm 118. *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God.*

Throughout the many years of Jesus' ministry, Jesus made good use of metaphorical stories (called parables in biblical circles) where Jesus takes an everyday understandable situation but ties to it a hidden or a second meaning that has a moral or a spiritual lesson for people. Now, sometimes in Jesus' story it was obvious what the message would be. Sometimes it took a little explaining, and sometimes Jesus just said it and left it for people to figure out, and it was kind of tricky, and different people thought of it differently.

I like the theory that during what turned out to be Jesus' last week, his last Passover pilgrimage, that Jesus started living out parables as much as he was telling parables. So it wasn't so much I will tell you a story and it has an inner meaning. What I'm doing has a second meaning.

And it begins with that Sunday entrance to the eastern gate, the beautiful gate, the gold gate. On the surface, Jesus is simply riding instead of walking, grabbing the happy attention of the crowd, highlighting maybe his importance or his authority that he's able to ride while others walk. But imagine contrasting that with Governor Pilate coming into town probably from the other side from the west. A different type of comparison and seeing of Jesus' entry is there. You had Pilate on his warhorse with his soldiers and their imperial banners and flags. And here's Jesus on a donkey surrounded by peasant followers who are simply waving branches from trees. There's that line in Zechariah 9... *Your ruler comes humbly riding on a donkey.* Jesus may have been living out a parable that my way is not the same as the empire's way.

Moving on, there's some variation on the various order and details of what happens later that day and during the next week. If I look mostly at what goes on in the Gospel of Matthew since that's our reading for today and this year, the next thing that comes is the cleansing of the temple. And it's actually Jeremiah who has this house of God become a den of robbers. Then there's stories of Jesus offering healing and teaching at the temple. The next day on Monday, Jesus is making his way back into town, having gone back to Bethany for the night, and he finds a fruit tree on the way that doesn't have any fruit on it. It's a fig tree. And Jesus is mad at the tree. *May you never ever have fruit again.* Now, it sounds like Jesus is just being a little picky and mad at a tree that it didn't have a snack for him. Mark's gospel, which is older than Matthew's, and Matthew would have had a copy of, notes that it wasn't even the season for figs. Matthew takes that away and makes us wonder if Jesus is just being petty. But that implies that Jesus' reason for saying what was said was something other than the fact that the tree wasn't doing its job properly. A barren tree is a longstanding old biblical symbol for lack of faithfulness, a lack of commitment. Jesus could simply be living out a parable here that the time is **now** to increase your faith and commitment, not to wait until it feels like it's more right or the season has come around or everything is in place. Now is the time to commit your faith. You got to go against the grain.

Jesus has a few spoken parables. He talks about wise bridesmaids who bring enough extra oil for the wedding reception just in case the wedding party is a bit late, which they were. And Jesus tells a bunch of parables with visual aids. Who should we pay taxes to? Well, give me a coin. Oh, that looks like Caesar's picture. Why don't you give Caesar what's Caesar and give God what belongs to God? Jesus has debates with chief priests and temple elders. Jesus debates with completely different Hebrew thinkers, the Sadducees. And Jesus debates

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

with his own group of Hebrew thinkers, the Pharisees. That's where we get the *what's the greatest commandment of all, the Torah*. And Jesus says, well, *it's love God with all that you've got and love your neighbor as yourself*.

One evening in Bethany, Jesus' head is anointed with expensive oil. And Jesus used that event to teach about the value of the intangible faithful action over debates about what's worthy and how we judge people for what they do rather than accepting the graciousness of what the moment is.

By Thursday, Jesus shares a meal, either the Passover meal itself or in one of the gospels, maybe the day before. And this meal itself is a lived out parable. Jesus is sharing the food and drink even with friends who ultimately betray or deny Jesus. The food and the drink become symbolic of their coming together and following Jesus. Common table, common elements. That evening, Jesus prays in the garden. And we've got sleepy Peter, Paul, and James. And Jesus asks, "Can we stay focused and alert long enough to finish the job?"

Lived out parables.

Even Jesus' betrayal by Judas, his arrest, his trial before the council and ultimately before Pilate, his denial by Peter. These are all living parables about persistence and forgiveness and choices and moving beyond a negative situation into what might be positive next. Just imagine the living parable possibilities in the soldiers mocking Jesus as a phony king putting on a purple robe, a crown of sharp branches. And then the living parable of Jesus on the cross engaging in conversation with the fellow condemned adjacent to him. Jesus' final words, he goes back to scripture, starting the week with Jeremiah and turning those tables and ending the week with a psalm of deep lament. *Why am I left alone?*

Spirit of Hope United Church is giving people opportunities to see and hear and experience some of these Holy Week stories. We have this potluck supper on Thursday where people are encouraged to come and share what's brought to the table. You don't even have to bring something for the table. There will be lots. Trust me, I've been to enough church potlucks over the years. So don't think, well, I did. I don't have time to bring something or I don't know if I can put that into my day, but come to the meal. We will share what's enough because that's the symbol of the potluck is that I don't only get what I bring. I get the bounty of what everyone brings. And then a special service on Friday morning when the choir and others will help us hear the story in words and experience it in music. You can even come to Emily Murphy Park on Easter morning, watch the sunrise, and let that be the living parable of the newness of Easter. But even if you only connect on the Sundays here in the church, Palm Sunday today at 10:30, next Sunday, Easter at 10:30, take some time this week to be aware that there's a lot going on between the waving of palms and shouting hosana and the excitement of people running through a garden shouting hallelujah on Easter.

For me to learn some basic guitar, I needed to take in the wisdom and the experience and the guidance of others. For the spiritually curious, as the old hymn quoted in Philippians says, we are invited to take our cues from the life and the teachings and actions of Jesus. Jesus had the skill to sustain the weary with a word, to insist on welcome and value in the midst of insults, to show love and care in humble acts, and in simple sharing. May we strive to share this same faithful mindset. Amen..

#371VU Open My Eyes

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg