**March 28, 2021 Worship Service**

Welcome

Hosanna, hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Behold our God, who comes riding on a donkey, the ruler who dares to be last rather than first.

Welcome to the First Congregational Church of Randolph on this Palm and Passion Sunday. We are delighted that you are here as we engage in this beginning of Holy Week that will lead us from the joy of Palm Sunday to the joy of Easter, but the only way to get to that is to go through the week that lies ahead. I hope you’ll make note of some of the things that are going on in our church. You’ll find them on our Facebook page and our website. We’ll have something each day of Holy Week to help you walk this journey from the joy of Palm Sunday into the depths of the human experience all week long, and leads us into that joy of resurrection next Easter Sunday.

Will you join with me in prayer? O God, creator and sustainer of all life, we come here this Palm Sunday with joy and excitement. We celebrate and shout hosanna as people did long ago, for it is with wonder and gratitude that we recognize that You are here with us. Through our singing and our praises, we know that Your Spirit is alive among us, and so we can say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” Which we say and pray in Jesus’ name, who taught us when we pray to say:

Our Father, who art in Heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Your Kingdom come, Your 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.

Scripture (reader: Cheryle Totten)

This morning’s Palm Sunday Gospel reading tells the story of Jesus arriving in Jerusalem. Crowds came to greet him and welcome him. They hoped he would be the conqueror who would set them free from the oppression of the Roman government. They put palm branches and clothing on the road to keep down the dust and to create a new path that no one had stepped on before. It was the expected tribute for the arrival of a king.

Our scripture reading, Mark 11, verses 1 through 11.

“As they approached Jerusalem and Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying 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. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this: ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”

“They went away and found a colt tied near a door outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They told them what Jesus had said, and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

“Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.”

Anthem: Let the People Shout Hosanna!

Let the people shout hosanna!

Praises to the Holy Lamb!

Glory, laud, and honor be to

Jesus Christ, the great I AM!

See the Lord in humble splendor,

Riding on a palm-laid path;

Just a donkey for a carriage,

Plodding as the crowds amass.

He enters not with trumpets,

Not with riches, nor haughty brow.

His majesty is modest.

Our humble King is coming now!

Let the people shout hosanna!

Praises to the Holy Lamb!

Glory, laud, and honor be to

Jesus Christ, the great I AM!

Let the people shout hosanna!

Praises to the Holy Lamb!

Glory, laud, and honor be to

Jesus Christ, the great I AM!

Blessed is He who comes

In the name of the Lord!

Blessed is He who comes

In the name of the Lord!

Blessed is He who comes

In the name of the Lord!

Blessed is He who comes

In the name of the Lord!

Let the people shout hosanna!

Praises to the Holy Lamb!

Glory, laud, and honor be to

Jesus Christ, the great I AM!

Let the people shout hosanna!

Praises to the Holy Lamb!

Glory, laud, and honor be to

Jesus Christ, the great I AM!

Open the gates!

Lift up your voice!

Open your hearts

And praise the Lord!

Shout hosanna!

Lenten Candle

Folks, I hope you notice all the artwork behind me around the cross. This was all put together, colored, and drawn by the children and youth of our church school and faith formation program. And we’ll be blessing those in just a moment. But right now I wanna return to the candles that we’ve been putting out each of the different Sundays, each of the different weeks going through the entire Lenten season, coming up and culminating today with the last candle. We’ve asked the kids to give us names of things that people do that they hope will cause other people to feel sad, or mad, or feel bad.

So so far the names that the kids have given us have included the name for fighting, and for bullying, and for name-calling, and for rudeness, and for teasing. So fighting, as we said, is when people use words or fists or pushing and shoving and escalate. Bullying is when people try to force other people with words or actions to make them do what they want or feel bad. And we have name-calling, which is giving people a definition or a name that makes them feel bad. We also have teasing and rudeness. Both of those are ways that people make other people feel excluded or left out, and I wanna talk a bit more about that with the last candle that we’ll be extinguishing, which is the candle of ignoring.

Sometimes, when we’re out in the playground or out and doing things, there are people who are always being left out. They’re being ignored, they’re not being included, they’re not being welcomed in. I think one of the things that Jesus has always taught us is that no one should be left out, that everyone should feel welcomed and invited and included so that everyone has a sense of feeling like they belong. So I hope that you can learn a bit more about the way of Jesus and put aside all the fighting and the bullying and the name-calling and the teasing and the rudeness and also the ignoring of people, and help not to bring sadness or help cause people to feel mad or feel bad, but to bring more love into the world. Thank you for sharing all of these candle names with us.

Blessing of the Palms

There was a tradition, actually an obligation, back in the time of Jesus and for centuries before, that when a dignitary came to town, particularly if it was a wealthy person or particularly a king or a ruler. To keep the dust down and to honor them and to give them a path that nobody had traveled before, people would go out and spread palm leaves on the roads and on the trails, on the roads that came into the community, into the town, as a way of celebrating the arrival of that king and providing a pathway into the very heart of Jerusalem.

Here we have the palms up here on the table, the ones that all around the cross here made by the children of our church school. You’ll have a chance to come and get these this morning after church. Come and drive by, we’ll pass one through the window to you with all of the COVID safety precautions. But right now, I’d like to invite you to join with me as we offer a prayer of blessing over these palms.

Let us give thanks to our God, who is most high, because it is right to give God thanks and praise. Will you join with me in prayer?

O God, who in Jesus Christ triumphantly entered Jerusalem, heralding a week of pain and sorrow, be with us now as we follow the way of the cross. In these events of defeat and victory you have sealed the closeness of death and resurrection, of humiliation and exaltation. We thank You for these branches and pictures that promise to become for us symbols of Your martyrdom and Your majesty. Bless them, and us, that their use this day may announce in our time that Christ has come and that Christ will come again. Amen. Come, Christ Jesus, amen.

Offering

Folks, as we come to the time of the offering in our church, let me remind you that the offering is a way for us to use the resources we have so we can come together in greater strength and have a greater impact on the world. I wanna encourage you to look at our Facebook page and watch a video about the Stop the Stigma Walk, which will be coming up towards the end of April. It’s one of the ways in which our church is participating with partners around the community to deal with the issues of the challenges people have, or mental and emotional health. So we encourage you to participate in the offering, because that is a way in which we come together to bring some of God’s love and God’s justice out into the world. It’s also the way in which we can let go into the hands of God that which represents us and our love and our care. So will you join with me in prayer over our offering?

Holy and gracious God, we do give You thanks for the gifts that You have given us. And we do give You thanks that one of those gifts is to open our eyes to the challenges in the world around us and then come together to meet those challenges with Your love and Your compassion. So bless our offering, bless the givers, that our time, our talents, and our treasures may be used together for Your glory to help heal Your world. We ask in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Please go to firstuccrandolph.org to donate now.

Anthem: Hosanna

Humble King,

You chose the road that led to suffering.

Nothing was spared to prove Your love for me.

You’re the mystery,

That Your final breath became eternity.

What we had lost forever, You redeemed.

Hosanna, hosanna

In the highest forever.

Hosanna, hosanna,

Hallelujah forever.

Triumphant King,

The Lamb who was slain, who rose in majesty,

There’s never a heart beyond a victory.

You are the one that we are welcoming.

You are the one that we are welcoming.

Hosanna, hosanna

In the highest forever.

Hosanna, hosanna,

Hallelujah forever.

Blessed is He,

Blessed is He

Who comes in the name of the Lord.

Join now and sing,

Jesus is King!
He reigns forevermore.

Blessed is He,

Blessed is He

Who comes in the name of the Lord.

Join now and sing,

Jesus is King!

He reigns forevermore.

Hosanna, hosanna

In the highest forever.

Hosanna, hosanna,

Hallelujah forever.

Hosanna, hosanna

In the highest forever.

Hosanna, hosanna,

Hallelujah forever.

Pastoral Prayer

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.” It wasn’t long before those words would fade in the air and the mood would change. So we have changed the mood here as well. Because as we go from the joy of Palm Sunday to the joy of Easter, the only way to get there is to go through the story of Holy Week. So we are here to tell about the Passion of Jesus Christ, and I invite you to join with me in a moment of prayer as we move into that mood.

Eternal God, whose whisper silences the shouts of the mighty, quiet within us every voice but Your own. Speak to us now through the suffering and the death of Jesus Christ that by the power of Your holy spirit we may receive grace to show forth Christ’s love in lives committed to Your service. Amen.

Friends, we cannot get through the events of this week or the events of our lives without prayer and without the support of each other’s prayers. So I invite you today as we come into this moment of prayer to remember those places, those ones that for you are places of gratitude and thanksgiving, but also those places that have been for you pain, fear, anxiety, and worry in your life. Our Facebook page has been one of the places where people are posting prayers. You’ll find some there for friends and family who have gone into the hospital this week, for folks who are worried about loved ones they care about, the people dealing with fresh diagnoses. We invite you to read those and share your own prayers there as well, and then let us come together with all of that into this moment of prayer. Let us pray.

It is hard for us to imagine, Jesus, what this week meant for You. But You, in this week, have embodied the very nature of God, of a God who came down into the helpless form of an infant, of a child in a manger, journeyed with us in moments of joy and laughter with friends and with family, and moments of pain, those who would send at you abuse and denial and betrayal. You are a God unlike any description of God anywhere, who comes into this world to show the grace of love that comes through Your willingness to sacrifice, sacrifice Your very self, that we might know a pathway to love, a pathway to compassion, a pathway to caring. So Holy God, this week teach us the lesson that You have embodied and exemplified for us, that we might engage in that place of sacrifice that lets go of our own will and surrenders our lives into Your hands. So that through us, the fullness of Your love and Your justice might come into the world. Hear this prayer, as we come before You in a moment of stillness, to let this moment and this week settle into our souls.

Holy One, who faced and endured the cross for the sake of God’s glory and love in the world, we offer You our prayers and ourselves in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Passion of Jesus According to Mark

As we continue this holy day, looking at both the Palm and Passion stories of Jesus Christ, we want to share with you the Passion story as it’s told in the Gospel of Mark, the 14th and the 15 chapters. Here begins the 14th chapter:

### The Plot to Kill Jesus

14 It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24749a)] by stealth and kill him; 2 for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

### The Anointing at Bethany

3 While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24751b)] as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. 4 But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? 5 For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24753c)] and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. 6 But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. 7 For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the good news[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24757d)] is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

### Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. 11 When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

### The Passover with the Disciples

12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” 13 So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” 16 So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

17 When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18 And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” 19 They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, “Surely, not I?” 20 He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24768e)] into the bowl[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24768f)] with me. 21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

### The Institution of the Lord’s Supper

22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” 23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, “This is my blood of the[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24772g)] covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

### Peter’s Denial Foretold

26 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written,

‘I will strike the shepherd,

 and the sheep will be scattered.’

28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” 29 Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” 30 Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” 31 But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same.

### Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. 34 And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” 35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 He said, “Abba,[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24784h)] Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” 37 He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? 38 Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;[[i](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24786i)] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. 41 He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

### The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45 So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. 46 Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. 47 But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48 Then Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? 49 Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” 50 All of them deserted him and fled.

### Jesus before the Council

53 They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. 54 Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. 55 Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. 56 For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. 57 Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” 59 But even on this point their testimony did not agree. 60 Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” 61 But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah,[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24809j)] the Son of the Blessed One?” 62 Jesus said, “I am; and

‘you will see the Son of Man

seated at the right hand of the Power,’

and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? 64 You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them condemned him as deserving death. 65 Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” The guards also took him over and beat him.

### Peter Denies Jesus

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” 68 But he denied it, saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went out into the forecourt.[[k](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24816k)] Then the cock crowed.[[l](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24816l)] 69 And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” 70 But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” 71 But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.” 72 At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

### Jesus before Pilate

15 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. 2 Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You say so.” 3 Then the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.” 5 But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

### Pilate Hands Jesus over to Be Crucified

6 Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. 7 Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. 8 So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. 9 Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” 10 For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. 12 Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24832a)] with the man you call[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24832b)] the King of the Jews?” 13 They shouted back, “Crucify him!” 14 Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

### The Soldiers Mock Jesus

16 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24836c)]); and they called together the whole cohort. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. 18 And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” 19 They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. 20 After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

### The Crucifixion of Jesus

21 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. 22 Then they brought Jesus[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24842d)] to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

25 It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” 27 And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24847e)] 29 Those who passed by derided[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24848f)] him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!” 31 In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Messiah,[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24851g)] the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

### The Death of Jesus

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24852h)] until three in the afternoon. 34 At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”[[i](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24853i)] 35 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.” 36 And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” 37 Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24858j)] breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”[[k](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24858k)]

You have heard the passion story. And I trust that that story itself calls us into the place of self-examination. I ask you to join with me in a moment of confession.

*Oh God, creator and sustainer of all life, we come here this Palm Sunday, with that joy and excitement. We celebrate and shout Hosanna as people did long ago. We also come with sober hearts, for we remember that those shouts of affirmation soon became shouts of accusation, as the crowd chanted, “crucify him! Crucify him!” And the powers and the principalities of the world listened. And you were nailed to the tree. And you died. And we did it to you. We are as responsible as they were. But you died on the cross for us. You forgave us then. Forgive us again. We ask in the name of the crucified Christ. Amen.*

Trust this, friends: that if we confess our sins, if we learn anything from this story, it is that God is faithful and just to forgive us, and more than that. God wants us to know we’re forgiven, so we can let go of the burdens that weigh us down, and be free to live the lives of love for which God sacrificed God’s very self. Friends, you are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Song of the Thorn

O dearest Rose, O purest flow’r,

Upon the cross You cry.

Would You devote Your sacred head

For sinners such as I?

Place me not upon His brow.

Twist me not into His crown.

Let me cling unto His tree

And guard the Rose of Calvary.

On the stem we both adorn.

Love surrenders to the thorn.

Petals crushed, O perfect Bloom,

The scent of heaven’s sweet perfume.

O Sharon’s Rose, Your garden waits,

For nails and thorns have sealed Your fate.

Like scarlet tears Your petals fall

And all Your beauty fades.

My ev’ry sin a cruel thorn.

My very touch a thing of scorn.

Still He draws me to His side

And for the thorn the Flower dies.

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison.

(Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy)

Benediction

Friends, today I want you to go forth into this holy week. I want you to let that story come into your heart, into your soul, into your lives. I want you to journey with Jesus through the events of this week, into the crucifixion and into the empty tomb, in preparation for the joy of Easter and resurrection. So, make a point to make this week your holy week. And may the love of God, and the grace of Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you every step of the way this week. Amen.