## Psalm 118:1-2; 19-29

Leader: Give thanks to the LORD, for God is good; God’s love endures forever.

**People: Let Israel say: “God’s love endures forever.”**

Leader: Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

**People: This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.**

Leader: The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

**People: LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!**

Leader: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. The LORD is God, and he has made her light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession upto the horns of the altar.

**People: You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.**

**All: Give thanks to the LORD, for God is good; God’s love endures forever.**

## Matthew 21:1-11

**1** As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

**4** This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

**5** “Say to Daughter Zion,   
   ‘See, your king comes to you,   
gentle and riding on a donkey,   
   and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’

**6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. **8** A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

   “Hosannato the Son of David!”

   “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

   “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

**10** When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

**11** The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

“With a Little Forethought”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

April 2, 2023

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Our Bible study on Thursday mornings is a Bible study and discussion, and in our conversations this week I thought we really need to rename it again. It is really as much about our getting together, about our sharing stories and questions of faith, and I’d like to remind everyone that you are always welcome. It happens at 10:00 on Thursday mornings and the Zoom link is always in the eVisitor for those who don’t want to or can’t be in-person. We’ve been reading Luke since the beginning of January, so don’t worry; you won’t be caught in the rapid pace of our study. In rereading some of the earlier chapters of Luke after Bible Study last week, and also during and after the worship service I led at Parker Ridge this last Thursday afternoon, I learned something. We need a little clarity about Jesus. I also know that anything I can say about Jesus, and about our scripture lessons has been thought and expressed by countless people throughout the last twenty-one centuries, and those same thoughts have probably has been unthought by as many. That is to say, that many of the statements we make about Jesus are thought by many not to be true. In a way this goes without saying, but at the same time, I have a pretty profound sense that my job becomes, more and more, about making these simple statements about Jesus. We cannot take for granted—not by any means—that the world we live in knows some simple facts about what it is that Jesus was, did, and is for us and for the whole world.

So, fact one for this morning. Jesus knew what he was in for. If we think about the way he proclaims the fulfillment of Isaiah in himself, we know this. Jesus tells his early congregation in Galilee that the fulfillment of Isaiah’s declaration of the year of Jubilee—that is when debts are forgiven, when sins are forgiven, when the blind will be given sight, when the lame will walk—the year of Jubilee is fulfilled in him. For this happy news, Jesus receives their criticism. If you remember back to our sharing chapter 4 of the really wonderful book called the Gospel of Luke, they drive him to the edge of town and try to push him off the edge of a cliff.

For today, though, I want us to focus on Palm Sunday, and about Jesus’ knowing what he was in for in Jerusalem in the week to follow. We read about the circumstances of Jesus’ arriving on a foal, a young donkey, and are told that this, too, is fulfillment of prophecy from centuries earlier. But the question that fell on the people who walked with Jesus, and with us, who strive to walk with Jesus even now, is why, oh why, did he keep on going into Jerusalem, if he knew he was going to be killed?

Don’t we get it? In talking with a friend of mine about this question, I was surprised to find myself learning more, and deepening my faith as a result. It is one thing to say aloud, Jesus died for our sins. It is another to know that he made choices throughout his life that prepared him for just this one act. Jesus, being fully human as well as divine, had free will, just as we do, and just as Peter and Judas did. One of the more significant ideas my friend and I mused about was whether the fact that Jesus’ *knowing* what would happen somehow *caused* them to happen. We all have *free will*, but presumably we don’t all have *prophetic knowledge*. Let’s think about the difference as we meet some of the actions during the last week of Jesus’ earthly life.

Jesus called Peter the rock, and we have come to know Peter as the rock on which the church we know was largely founded. Still, Jesus told Peter that he would betray him three times—and he did. He denied even knowing him, despite being the one who recognized him as the Christ, when others thought he was one of many things, a prophet, or a liar, or somehow a reincarnated prophet from the past. Peter names him as the Son of God. So, did Jesus know that Peter would deny him, or does Jesus’ saying so somehow incline Peter to make that decision in the moments in which he was asked if he was one of the men with him? It is an interesting though experiment of sorts that becomes more significant when we think about Judas.

At what we have come to call the Last Supper, the celebration of Passover in the upper room with Jesus and his disciples, Jesus tells his disciples that one of them will betray him. We will remember the details of this encounter later this week when we gather on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Judas made the choice to betray Jesus to the Roman authorities, selling his whereabouts for 30 pieces of silver. Without this choice, all that we see unfold during Good Friday and Easter would not have happened. So, scholars and believers have long wondered whether Judas *had to* make the decisions he did that led to Jesus’ death. Did Judas’ having had the idea of betrayal presented to him somehow nudge him to make the choices he did?

Finally, we have Jesus himself, whose life as we know it from Luke particularly, reveals that he knew what would happen to him. Indeed, he *chose* to enter Jerusalem even knowing that the powers of this world were working to end him. Jesus knew that he was going to be killed and chose to undergo all of the betrayal and suffering that the week ahead of us involves. As certainly as he knew the events of the end of his earthly life, though, he had proclaimed repeatedly that he had come to walk among us so that we might have life, and life abundantly. Sure, the people who walked into Jerusalem with Jesus had a different sense of the reign that Jesus came to bring. Maybe we do too. Yet, we also know that the Kin-dom Jesus proclaimed, the Kingdom that has been prophesied for us is ready for the having. We read about it in scripture.

We have free will, as Jesus did, as Judas did, as Peter did and as all humanity does. We also have some advance information, maybe not too dissimilarly from the way that Peter and Judas had been told what they would do.What can we do with a little foreknowledge? Well, first we can believe we have it. Jesus gave it to us. We have been promised that we can have abundant life and life eternal, putting our faith in God and living in response to God’s commands to us. We can know what to expect this week, representing not only Jesus’ suffering, but also all that we experience and even suffer in this life. And we can prepare ourselves for it. Jesus prepared himself for his ministry with prayer, and defeated temptation head-on.

Preparation for and the response to suffering is not only accomplished by thoughts and prayers, however. What Jesus *does* in his life is heal—the sick, the blind, and even the ear of one who had been wounded by the violence of Peter. To this, Jesus says we must have “no more of this,” which we know as a call to the end of violence. Still, though, we ignore this call, allowing for the proliferation of guns and violence against others, even children. We have foreknowledge of the effect of guns, so what do we do with that knowledge, even when we know there will be backlash? Do we continue to walk toward the difficulty, knowing there will be opposition, but choosing the better way? What can we do with a little foreknowledge? We can exercise our free will, choosing to do what Jesus asks us to do, even today, knowing that the promise to us when we do so is abundant life, now—in the form of greater safety and overall peace—and in the future as we live out life eternally.

So, let’s celebrate today. We celebrate the coming of a new King. Our King. One who defies explanation in terms that are familiar to the world, even while he comes to change the world. Amen.