



Greetings!

During this time, while worship services are suspended at First Church, Rev. Mike would like to share a Palm/Passion Sunday Gospel lesson & message with you.

You may view the video of Rev. Mike sharing this message by clicking this link or copying & pasting it in your browser...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnMlhhdScfU&feature=youtu.be>

And you may use this 'mini-bulletin' to follow along with the service, reading responses with Kathleen in the video. Our 'mini-bulletin' also includes other information & announcements to keep you informed. Please feel free to share the bulletin & the video with others.



~ First United Church of Christ ~

229 Church St. • Easton • Pennsylvania 18042

Rev. J. Michael Dowd, Pastor ~ Sheila Cooke, Music Director

Telephone: 610-258-3361 ~ Email: firstucc2@verizon.net

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Sunday, April 5th, 2020 ~ 10:00 a.m. worship

~ Palm/Passion Sunday ~

~ Holy Week Begins ~



Call to Worship: (Please read responsively)

Leader: Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

People: **Hosanna in the highest!**

Leader: Hosanna! Blessed is the coming reign of God!

People: **Hosanna in the highest!**

Leader: Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in humility and righteousness!

People: **Hosanna in the highest!**

Leader: Hosanna! Save us, O God!

People: **Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!**

All: **Save us, O God, and fill our hearts in this time of worship.**

Call to Confession

Let us take this opportunity to prepare ourselves for Holy Week and confess our sins.

Confession of Sin

Holy God, as we remember your Son's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we confess that all too often we have been part of the crowd. When things go our way, we believe our lives are good because we worked hard. When things do not go our way, we blame others for our troubles. As we live together through our National health crisis God, help us to take responsibility, not only for our own lives, but for the lives of our neighbors. Forgive us when we have forgotten your commandments and have failed to love our neighbors as ourselves, but instead have judged others, believing them not worthy of our help or our compassion. Forgive us of our faults, and renew in us a sense of your love, justice and mercy. Guide us in ways we might live out your commandments more fully in our lives. Help us to seek Christ in the suffering in this world and guide us as the body of Christ to be your hands and feet. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Even on the cross, Jesus cried out for forgiveness. We are worthy of forgiveness and love. We are called to share that love and forgiveness with others. Let us go and share the Good News. Amen.

HOLY SCRIPTURES

Our Epistle Lesson for Palm Sunday, April 5th is: Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Our Gospel Lesson for Palm Sunday, April 5th is: Matthew 21:1-11 (NIV)

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethpage 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,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”^[c]

“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.”

Meditation ~ "Will You Be a Donkey?"



Late one-night last week Kathleen and I were watching TV and came across one of those old wild west TV shows, Wagon Train, I think. It got me to thinking about one of the classic images of the Old West; the gnarled, grubby old coot trudging through the creek-beds, canyons, and mountain passes, with his trusty, heavy-laden donkey by his side. We know the old gold miners didn't use horses because they were not sure footed enough to traverse the rough terrain, the narrow, winding trails, the slippery creek-side stones. After all, a successful miner had a donkey loaded with the most valuable cargo in the universe: gold dust and gold nuggets. Such treasure could only be trusted to donkeys.

Today, although not right now, tourists can relive some of the experience of donkey travel when they sign up to take the long trail ride down into the base of the Grand Canyon. That's not a trip I would ever take, you know I'm not a fan of heights. I used to think that the donkey was used because his smaller feet and shorter legs made him more stable on the trail; or that some innate intelligence made these creatures more capable of picking out the best track to follow.

I've learned that it is almost the exact opposite. Far from being cautious and too reticent to go near the steep edges of the canyon trail, the Grand Canyon donkeys often horrify their passengers by walking as close to the edge as possible. Instead of hugging the protected side of the track, the donkeys nimbly traipse down the canyon right along the very edge of the precipice, their passengers teetering on their backs.

It seems that donkeys feel safest and most secure when they can clearly see where the edge is, where the greatest danger lies. What unnerves a donkey is knowing an edge is near, but not being able to see it and so gauge the best path to take.

In today's gospel text it's easy to get swept up in the celebration of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. For once, all the people around Jesus seem to be supportive. For once people appear excited about his presence. For once the crowds are confident in his abilities.

To be sure, their shouts indicate that there was still some confusion about his true identity - he's called variously by the crowds "Son of David," "the one who comes in the name of the Lord," and "prophet." Matthew is citing the royal acclamations from Zechariah 9:9 and brings all the expectations of the Messianic king to this dramatic scene.

But against all the hoopla and hosannas, the Matthew is careful to emphasize an almost seemingly discordant note in this celebratory theme. Jesus specifically instructs two disciples to appropriate for him a very particular mount, a young donkey colt. Matthew's text even carefully notes the colt's mother, a donkey, and includes her in the procession. Matthew doesn't want anyone to misread the identity of Jesus' mount and suppose that this colt was some young, high-spirited horse, a far more obvious noble steed.

Matthew wants readers to be perfectly aware of the incongruity between the crowd's shouts, the royal processional, and the humble, simple beast of burden upon which Jesus rode.

Donkeys were work horses. Donkeys were the common pack animals used by hard working laborers, landowners, and merchants alike. More exotic, long distance travel and rich transport caravans employed the more demanding, expensive, and haughty camel to carry big loads. The donkey was a much simpler, less impressive worker. It accomplished the most mundane of daily tasks in small villages and inside the big cities as well. Gray, substantial, and subservient, donkeys were a necessary, but unexceptional part of first-century life.

The donkey is clearly Jesus' own choice of mount for his entrance into Jerusalem. Riding on that humble beast, Jesus exhibited his dual identity.

He was King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But he was also servant of servants, a work horse, helper of helpers. While he was ushered into Jerusalem with a royal processional, he rode on the steed of the simplest peasant. The back of a donkey doesn't put one up above the heads of others. In fact, sitting on the short-legged beasts put the rider pretty much at face-to-face level with a standing crowd. Jesus couldn't impressively ride through a crowd mounted on a donkey. He could only ride in the midst of the crowd, being as much a part of the crush as were all the others.

Church tradition tells us (though none of the gospels report it) that this wasn't Jesus' first donkey ride. Matthew's text doesn't detail how Joseph traveled with Mary to Egypt and back to Nazareth again. Nor does Luke's gospel describe how Mary and Joseph journeyed to Bethlehem. But all of us have in our heads the picture of a pregnant Mary perched on the back of a sturdy donkey. Our mind's eye puts her back on that beast for the escape to Egypt and the homeward trek to Nazareth after Herod had died. The church has a long tradition that in honor of the donkey's humble service to

Jesus, the animal was rewarded with a permanent "sign of the cross," for most donkeys do show a distinctive black cross pattern across their sturdy shoulders. Despite this lip service from church tradition, the donkey really has no glory. Little girls and boys don't dream of riding on a little donkey. The Kentucky Derby doesn't blow the herald horn for a herd of dinky donkeys to race around the track. And everyone from Shakespeare to Pinocchio knows that fools and dolts are depicted as donkeys. Of course, the donkey's other common name says it all: a donkey is just an . . . well, you know what that word is.

Yet if the mission of the church is to carry Christ into the world, then each of us is called to be a donkey. There's no particular glory in being a donkey. There are only long trails, steep roads, heavy loads, and little or no recognition for a completed job. I think this is particularly important for us to understand this morning. As we face, as a church family, our own families, our community and our nation, the Corona Virus onslaught, we must look at what we are carrying.

We're carrying The King of Kings, The Prince of Peace. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The one who will carry us through this current turmoil.

You and I are called to be donkeys. Donkeys are known for strong backs and sure feet. Donkeys carry a lot of burdens, and they carry their loads along pathways that are too treacherous for others to walk.

Of course, donkeys are known for one other characteristic: they can be stubborn, obstinate, stiff-necked. From the days of the Hebrews in the wilderness, God's people themselves have often been identified as stiff-necked (Exodus 32:9; 34:9). Perhaps this same stiff-necked quality added to Jesus' choice of the donkey - a stubborn little steed with a mind of its own, even though it would work hard and long. Sound familiar?

So, I end this morning with a question: As we face this crisis will we be donkeys? Donkeys that are sure of foot, sure of faith, sure of path?

Will we carry Christ? Wherever he goes? However, he goes.

Will you be a donkey?

Will you walk cliffs? Will you not be afraid of the edges and the extremes? Will you be cliff-walkers who journey the edges between this world and the next, between hate and love, between war and peace?

Will you be a donkey?

Will you be humble enough to be a beast of burden? To carry the burdens of others? To carry your cross? To be a strong witness for those in fear?

Finally, will you be a donkey? Will you shout with joy and praise God, welcoming the divine's presence with "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Ever wonder why the donkey is the only animal in the Bible that speaks? Balaam's donkey does in Numbers. Karl Barth at his 80th birthday party offered this testimony: "In the Bible there's talk of a donkey, or to be quite correct, an ass. It was allowed to carry Jesus to Jerusalem. If I have achieved anything in this life, then I did so as a relative of the ass who at that time was going his way carrying an important burden. The disciples had said to its owner: 'The Master has need of it.' And so, it seems to have pleased God to have used me at this time. Apparently I was permitted to be the ass which was allowed to carry as best I could a better theology, a little piece down the path..." (as quoted by John Robert McFarland's Preacher's Workshop called "The Illustration is the Point," The Christian Ministry, January-February, 1988, 21).

Will you be a donkey this Palm Sunday?



Prayer: (Please read responsively)

Leader: Holy God, mighty and merciful, we are in awe of a love so great; you came to Earth as a baby, to teach, to heal, to forgive and ultimately ride triumphantly into Jerusalem to give your life for us.

People: **O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!**

Leader: Strengthen and sustain your children who proclaim the Good News of the gospel in the face of persecution. Soften the hardened hearts of those who are unwilling to hear your Word that they might be born to a new life in you.

People: **O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!**

Leader: Encourage the outcast, the marginalized and the invisible people in our communities; open our eyes not only to see them, but bring them out of the shadows, and work for change to end poverty and indifference.

People: **O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!**

Leader: Comfort the grieving, those who cope with chronic illness -- physical or mental, and those who feel hopeless. Let them be assured of your

abiding presence even in the darkest times. Today we lift up the members of our extended church family for your special care and healing: Gregg D, Hannah and her new daughter Rheia, and Sarah, Tom Bougher and Bev Lambert's great granddaughter. We raise those in our congregation sharing their witness as they serve those in need of healing, David Skillenge, Jill West and Donna who serves youngsters in NYC. We think of those who must work in essential jobs including David Wandersee. We remember Ruth Forsythe who passed away last week and ask for comfort for her son Ross. We remember all of those who serve in the hospitals and emergency wards, the first responders, those who deliver food and the mail. The people who meet us and greet us in grocery stores.

People: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

Leader: We offer all the prayers of our hearts, singing hosanna as we worship the one who rode into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey.

People: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! Amen.

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 debts, As we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.**

Benediction

And so, it begins, we walk through this week
From palms now to passion, it's Jesus we seek.
Each moment we walk through these days now with Jesus,
Is time to see people, the way Jesus ... sees us.

To watch for the ones, who need hope, who need kindness.
Seeking the light, not the darkness that blinds us.
As you walk through these days, may the love you now know
Be spread to each person you meet on the go.

And may God who now blesses and keeps you in love
Whose face shines upon you with grace from above
Who looks on you with such joy and such favor,
This God, three in One gives you peace — life to savor. Amen!

As we navigate our way through this difficult and unpredictable time please share your personal, family and neighbor prayer requests. You can send them by email for our church office: firstucc2@verizon.net or you may call the office & leave a message. Also please share our First UCC Worship program with your friends and family.



Announcements for April 5th, 2020 ~ Palm/Passion Sunday



PLEASE NOTE: Hospitals no longer notify the church or the pastor unless you **SPECIFICALLY REQUEST IT**. So please, if you or a family member is hospitalized, let us know by calling the office at 610-258-3361! Please see our prayer list below.

OR by calling or texting Rev. Mike directly on his cell phone at 610-216-5471.



IMPORTANT FIRST CHURCH NOTES...

Rev. Dowd & our First Church leadership will continue to monitor the ongoing Corona virus situation. We will be especially mindful of the most vulnerable members of our First Church Family & make decisions accordingly.

We will be meeting on an ongoing basis to discuss upcoming events, projects & etc. We will share information on these decisions as they are made.

Please keep watching your **e-mail**, our **website** at www.firstucceaston.org, or our **Facebook** page at <https://www.facebook.com/FirstUCCEaston> or call our **Church Office at 610-258-3361** for updates & information.



FIRST LADIES & FUNDRAISER NOTES: The **DINNER DAMES** outing scheduled for **March 31st** has been **CANCELED**. The **First Ladies Fund Raisers** that were in progress ("Shoo Fly Cake Sale" & Barbeque Sale) have been **CANCELED**. Any orders that were already placed will be refunded once we begin gathering for worship again.

EASTER "SUNSHINE FUND" - We are also most grateful for continued donations to our "Sunshine Fund", which goes to assist any of our First Church Family members who are in need. **THIS FUND IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW**, with many people being out of work due to this health emergency. A **REMINDER** – If you are experiencing an emergency need, please contact the Church Office or Rev. Mike directly. **TODAY, SUN., APRIL 5th** is the **DEADLINE** to dedicate your Easter "Sunshine Fund" gift.



(Announcements continue...)

ANNOUNCEMENTS for 4/5/2020 ~ 10 a.m. ~ Palm/Passion Sunday

No matter who you are, or where you are on your life's journey, you're welcome here. Join us in celebrating First UCC's respect for the past and faith in the future.



SUNDAY DEDICATIONS From This Sun., 4/5/20 ~ Palm/Passion Sunday

Rev. Mike & Kathleen Dowd dedicate the bulletins in honor of their family.

Ruth Dalrymple dedicates flowers in loving memory of her husband, Robert.



STEWARDSHIP NOTE ~

- With the outbreak of the Coronavirus, church services and other activities at First UCC have been suspended for the foreseeable future. Even though our church services are suspended, our church expenses (gas bill, electric bill, etc.) must still be paid each month. With this in mind, we ask that you continue to contribute during this health crisis. You can mail your contributions to the church at 229 Church Street, Easton, PA 18042. Another option available to you is Online Giving, which allows you to make your contributions online from either your bank checking or bank savings account. If you are interested in this online option, please contact Rich Phifer at 610-217-9244 or email Rich at raphifer@rcn.com to get further information about this payment option.



First Church Prayer Requests ~

Prayer is a powerful thing! God invites us to pray with words of praise, thanksgiving & petitions for others & for ourselves. We gladly receive & share prayer concerns so that we may 'Bear one another's burdens' (Galatians 6:2) and 'Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.' (Romans 12:15).



IF YOU ARE IN NEED OF EMERGENCY PASTORAL CARE, please call our church office at 610-258-3361 or Rev. Mike at 610-216-5471.

We all ask for Your blessing, Lord, on all of those who are essential employees & remain in high risk positions, unable to isolate, in order to serve & protect us during this national health emergency & their families. Those in Health Care, First Responders, those who care for others, all those who wait on us in stores, restaurants & other places that we frequent, all those who will be cleaning

public places & all those around us who must deal with the public in other ways. Including those in our own families & church family who are 'essential' in their work places (**David S., David W., Jill W., Keith B., Mark C.,**) We pray for those who reside in group facilities (nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, group homes, etc.) we pray for Your protection over them Father.

We pray for Your healing for all those afflicted with this Corona virus or who may be ~ Bev Lamberts 14 yr. old great-granddaughter, **Alexis**, living in China, **Beth** (Linda W. relative) & others ~ we pray that Your healing love will wash over them, strengthen them & bring them to full & complete recovery.

(Announcements continue...)

Father, we lift up those who struggle with mental & emotional health & substance abuse issues, seen & unseen. For many, the amplified uncertainty of what is happening, fear, income/job loss, family stress, loss of support contacts, etc., is more than they can bear. Lord, speak Your Peace into the spirits of those who are gripped by these struggles that may be spiraling out of control. Help them to see You at the center of their storm & let them know You will be their strength.

*Lord, we pray for Your wisdom for those who are making decisions about how to keep us all safer. **Help us all to remain calm but cautious.***

We pray for those whose incomes will be affected due to closures, cancelations & cautions. This is a MAJOR problem for many. Help us to help each other through this time. Bless those who we are in debt to, (utility companies, credit card companies, loan holders, medical facilities, insurance companies, etc.) with understanding & compassion. We pray that we will be kind, compassionate & considerate with each other. Help us to see need in our neighbors & in our own families & help us to reach out, to share & to shine the light of hope on those around us.

Please keep these folks in your prayers... *Baby Rheia, sister Hazel, Hannah & Ross, Baby Cree & Trevor & Taylor C., Bob G., Bob L., Chauncy H., Chris, Chris H., Debbie S. & Family, Deacon Anthony Koury, David D., Denise, Beverly F., Doris S., Edward, Eleanor, The Elliot Family, Evelyn R., Fawn B., Ferne, Greg D., Helena, James R., Jeanette O. & Family, Jill R., Joe R., John M., John & Laura O., Kai & Kathy, Kathleen D., Kim Kelty, Lila, Lloyd S. Jr, Marjorie H., Mark, Marlene M., Michael R., Nancy M., Nancy & Ken A., Naomi, Nicole A., The Newhard Family, Phil & Mary Ellen C., Phyllis K., Ray U., Robert G., Robert S., Robert T., Ruth F., Sarah, Shelly D., Stewart W., Tom B., Tom V., William C., Will P., Jr. & all those affected by the recent storms, fires & other natural disasters, and now disease, Lord, protect them, keep them strong & help them to recover their lives. We pray for Ashley, Barbara, Bonnie, Brittany, Claritza, Davonna, Davon, Dawn, Delila, Katie, Kimberly, Skyler, Susan, Charlene, Amy, Jailien, Jessica, Rose, Twanda, Wendy, Nancy, Natasha & all officers & prisoners at NC Prison.*

ALSO, we lift up Ross Forsythe & their family, the Rush Family, the Flad/Orso Family & All whose broken hearts endlessly grieve. LORD, send Your sweet, tender & restorative love to cover them all.

Jesus, we pray for our Nation, that we can come together for each other, for this whole world Lord.

We pray for You to watch over parents & families & all of our young people. Especially now, while schools are closed. Lord keep Your hand on them & guide their choices & decisions. Help families to meet the extra needs they have during this time.

We lift up ALL victims of hatred, violence, abuse & their families & all people of faith as we pray for healing for them all, for our nation & an end to hate.

We lift up all of our military and all of our first responders, LORD, we ask for your protection over them all as they serve us all.

We pray for your mercy, grace for all those killed & healing for those wounded & for the families of the victims of the latest acts of gun violence. LORD, HELP US!!! Please take hold of those who are so rage filled or unstable that they unleash horrible evil into this world. Give our leaders the courage & compassion to help prevent any more of these tragedies.

We pray for our very planet. It seems to be groaning with earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, germs & all sorts of natural responses to our treatment of our host planet, our home here in the Universe. Lord help us to find better ways to live so we do not endanger ALL life that shares this planet with us.

(Announcements continue...)

Jesus, thank You for coming to save us! Without You, we would all be lost. AMEN.



**We all need to be “Corona Warriors”
We need to protect our loved ones, ourselves
& those around us!**

- One way to do that is to **LIMIT CONTACT IN PUBLIC PLACES** to only **NECESSARY** activities. In other words... **STAY HOME!!!**
- If you are sick **STAY HOME & CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR.**
- If you do go out to the store, check with neighbors & friends to see if you can pick up items for them (the fewer folks out there, the better!)
- Use grocery/pharmacy pick up services & delivery services.
- If you go out, make sure to wash your hands, sanitize your carts, car, bag handles, doors knobs, & all high touch areas.
- Katie & Larry Miner have volunteered to run **NECESSARY** errands for folks who are at high risk or cannot get out. You can contact Katie by calling 610-258-4426.

**Please keep watching your e-mail for updates & information!
Say your prayers, wash your hands & stay well!**



**The Church Office will be open on a limited basis during this time.
Please call the office at 610-258-3361 if you need something or before you come,
to make sure someone is there.**

**(But we hope you are all practicing “Social Distancing” &
only go out if it is absolutely necessary.)**

Say your prayers, wash your hands & be blessed!

(Announcements continue...)



“Sunshine Fund” Contributions for our Needy



Our “Sunshine Fund” assists those in need within our congregation. It will be especially important at this time! If you would like to dedicate a special Easter “Sunshine Fund” gift, please use this form & mail it to the church office so that we receive it by Palm Sun., April 5th, 2020.

Donation Amount: \$ _____ Your Offering Envelope No. _____

Presented by: _____

In Memory or Honor of: _____

**Please make checks payable to: First U.C.C., 229
Church St., Easton, PA 18042**