

Faith United Church of Christ

“An inclusive spiritual family shaping a better you for creating a better world.

A place to make a difference.”

April 9, 2017

6th Sunday in Lent

Sacred Fellowship 10:45 a.m.

Palm/Passion Sunday

We are delighted that you are here today! We hope you will find us an affirming, uplifting, and committed family of faith. Here we work to make everyone, without any exceptions, to feel accepted, inspired, and encouraged in their spiritual journey. In dialogue, we seek to understand. In encouragement, we seek to heal. In all things we yearn to live by love, for peace, with joy. This is a place where your intellect will be challenged, your heart will be nurtured, and your spirit refreshed. Varying beliefs are expressed openly and freely, and your doubts will not be suppressed. We trust that we are all, every person and part of creation, continuing to be blessed by God's grace; and that in community we can help each other to see this grace alive in our lives and relationships. We hope to share our gifts with you, even as we pray that you will want to share your gifts with us. Whoever you are and wherever you may be in your life's journey, we invite you to be a part of our lives and our spiritual home. Welcome!

POINTS TO PONDER

“Look, your king is coming to you, humble,
and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

— Matthew 21.5

“Entry processions were important occasions. Whether a general, governor, official, or emperor, they displayed Roman political and military power. Jesus' entry parodies this mind-set. Riding a donkey, not a warhorse, his goal is not domination, intimidation, and greatness, but humble service.”

— Warren Carter, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, pp. 1783-84

The entrance into Jerusalem [on Palm Sunday] has all the elements of theatre of the absurd: the poor king; truth comes riding on a donkey; symbolic actions... even parading without a permit! Also, when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem," what was involved was direct action, an open confrontation and public demonstration of the incompatibility of evil with the Kingdom of God.

— David Kirk

“Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer”;
but you are making it a den of robbers.’”

— Matthew 21.12-13

“Jesus attacks the Temple and its leadership. Money was exchanged to enable participation in worship. Overturning the tables disrupts its economy and worship. Jesus quotes Is. 56.7 and Jer. 7.11, a lengthy attack on the corrupt elite who oppress the poor but seek legitimacy in the Temple.... Jesus heals people excluded and manifests God's inclusive presence. He upsets the leaders.”

— Warren Carter, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, pp. 1784

“(Jesus) indicted the temple authorities as robbers who collaborated with the robbers at the top of the imperial domination system. They had made the temple into a den of robbing and violence. Jesus' action was not a cleansing of the temple, but an indictment of the temple.”

— Marcus Borg, *Jesus: The Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*, p. 235

“Among most Christian scholars, there now is little doubt that Jesus grew up in rural Galilee, became a local rabbi of note and a political activist, and recruited disciples. The entry Jesus made into Jerusalem, riding a donkey when the rich and the powerful rode horses, fit within this context. He was mocking them with a form of street theater. The incident that he instigated at the Jerusalem Temple also meshed with this new interpretation. He was protesting the corruption that came from the merging of authority between the Temple hierarchy and the Roman occupiers. His crucifixion took on a new meaning, too. After he provoked these disturbances – challenging the Temple and Roman power structures – Jesus was condemned as an insurrectionist and was crucified by Roman soldiers.”

— Rev. Howard Bess, from <http://consortiumnews.com/2013/04/15/jesus-as-a-real-life-insurrectionist/>

“That Jesus' mission was in direct opposition to Roman imperial domination is dramatically displayed in his death by crucifixion and the circumstances of his birth, Augustus' decree and Herod's massacre.... Indeed, his whole mission, which focused on renewal of Israel, was also opposition to Roman imperial rule and its effects. This is explicit in his exorcisms and proclamation of the kingdom of God, and more implicit in his renewal of covenantal community. Those activities, which took place in village communities, might not have resulted in his arrest and crucifixion as an insurgent. But he had the audacity to march up to Jerusalem at the highly charged time of Passover, carry out a forcible demonstration symbolizing God's condemnation of the Temple, and state, however cleverly, that it was not lawful to render tribute to Caesar. Those were acts of insurrection that the Roman governor and the client-rulers of Jerusalem could not tolerate.”

— Richard A. Horsley

“Jesus’ concern was not the commercial activity itself but the exploitation that was embedded within it, activities that were conducted by the Jewish authorities and which took place in the temple and elsewhere.... Jesus’ actions in the temple were not only religious. Jesus was also taking action to oppose the major economic and political institution of his day.”

— Edith Rasell, ucc.org

“The “system” is how we, who live in a democracy, organize our society. If we don’t like the system, if we think it violates our values and is at odds with our faith, then we need to get involved and change it. We must follow Jesus’ lead, raise our voices and act to end these systemic abuses. This work, this ministry, probably won’t make us popular. We might be accused of engaging in political activities, just like Jesus was. But if we are to follow Jesus, it is what we must do.”

— Edith Rasell, ucc.org

CALLED TOGETHER AS SPIRITUAL FAMILY

Welcome and Announcements

Please sign the registration pads at the ends of the pews on the center aisle.

We ask that you please shut off cell phones and practice quietness during the service.

*Please join us for fellowship and refreshments after the worship
in Romig Hall (lower level of elevator or stairs).*

* = *You are invited to stand as you are able*

Prelude

Rhosymedre (Lovely)

R. Vaughan Williams

Welcoming the Light of Love in Our Midst *(acolytes light altar candles)*

We prepare ourselves for communing with the sacred as love’s light is brought into our awareness. The light of love burns within and among each of us, and we carry that light into our sanctuary; visually reminding us of the image of the divine that lives in our hearts, minds, and souls – and that we nourish through our faith-filled fellowship.

***Procession of Palms by the Children**

“Hosanna, Loud Hosanna”

#213

***Centering Our Souls**

Inspired by Matthew 21.1-17

On this Palm Sunday, O God, you ask us to -like Jesus- enter Jerusalem, the City of Peace, by a different entrance than the ones who represented an unjust empire.

We are called to enter humbly and gently – though not without a cause, and not without causing a stir.

Jesus parodied the values of the Roman Empire by riding in on a colt of a donkey rather than a strong, swift steed.

He came not with the force or threat of violence as they did, but with the power and truth of compassion and inclusion.

The people who journeyed to the Temple city for celebrating Passover urged him on, hoping he would be their awaited Messiah that would save them from their oppression.

He came to save; not through military might, but spiritual fortitude.

Jesus more than overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of the sellers of doves for sacrifice.

He overturned the value system of empires.

He did not seek to gain authority through domination, fear, or intimidation, but through service, love, and humbleness.

He was tried and convicted for being an insurrectionist.

He condemned the greed and corruption of the Temple officials, who followed the practices of the Roman oppressors in taking advantage of the poor and powerless. He was a threat to the ‘powers that be.’

They were making God’s house a den of thieves.

He reminded them that it was instead a house of prayer – where everyone regardless of income, health, social status, or nationality was invited.

Those who the authorities excluded, he not only welcomed but healed.

Help us, O God, to latch onto your values rather than those of empire in our own society.

**Let our pilgrimage to the City of Peace be one which builds a lasting peace, made possible by modeling our values after the one who came “in the name of the Lord.”
May it be so.**

Our Stories of Random Acts of Kindness & Intentional Deeds of Compassion

WE LISTEN FOR THE SACRED IN THE MIDST OF OUR LIVES

Choral Anthem

"Great Day"

Dennard

A Time for All God’s Children

Alva Chellman

Children’s Choir

“Jesus Loves Me”

Following the Children's Choir, the nursery is available for infants and toddlers under 4 years. The nursery is located through the front door to the right, and up the steps past the offices.

Prayers

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Silent Meditation: The Prayers of the People

Pastoral Prayer

The Prayer Jesus Taught (unison) *Please feel free to do the version you know, or the one below:*

“Our heavenly Creator, sacred be your name: your kin-dom* come, your will be done, on earth as if in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kin-dom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen”

**"Kin-dom" is an inclusive, non-authoritarian, and egalitarian term that reminds us that we are all "kin" as the children of God.*

***Hymn for Messianic Expectation** “All Glory, Laud, and Honor” **#216**

Scripture Lesson Matthew 21.1-17

Message “Humble, Yet Brazen: A Peaceable and Determined Revolutionary”

***Hymn for Commitment to the Way** “O Jesus, On a Donkey”

Tune: Angel's Story 76.76 D; Music: Arthur H. Mann, 1881; Words: Rev. Bret Stuart Myers, 3/23/2007®

O Jesus, on a donkey did ride through shouting crowds
They with their palms high waving declared, “Hosanna!”, loud
They laid their cloaks before you; they praised you as their king
But would they with you suffer, when on the cross you'd cling?

Blessed be the name of “Jesus,” who comes by God's own grace
You taught love to all people, considered not their place
When told to stop disciples from offering their praise
You said, “If these were silent, then stones their shouts would raise!”

And when you saw the city, before it you did weep
Because there was no peace there, you knew what it would reap
You cried because they'd hidden the truth from their own eyes
Though God had sent a savior, his truth they did despise

You entered in the temple, into the house of prayers
But greed had brought the sellers there with their tempting wares
You drove them from the temple, reclaiming God's decree:
“God's house is not a market, but there to bend your knee.”

O Jesus, help me follow, despite a looming cross
When fears or dangers threaten, may I not count the cost
Like you may I go forward to pave the way for peace
And if with pain I suffer: My love, 'midst death, increase!

WE DEDICATE OURSELVES TO GOD'S SERVICE THROUGH FAITHFULNESS

Prayer of Confession & Assurance of Pardon

People: **Loving God, we confess that the streets of our lives are often crowded with a parade mood filling the air masking a callous indifference and lukewarm faith. Save us from thin hopes and small dreams.**

Leader: Where and when we fail, God is there to make all things new. Where and when we reach out with trembling hands and shaky hearts, God holds us close and forgives all things. Go in the knowledge that you are forgiven and cherished.

Written by the Rev. Susan A. Blain, Minister for Faith Formation; Curator for Worship and Liturgical Arts. Copyright 2017 Local Church Ministries, Faith Formation Ministry Team, United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Permission granted to reproduce or adapt this material for use in services of worship or church education. All publishing rights reserved.

Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory Organ Improvisation
***Song of Dedication** *Tune: Old Hundredth*

When we give thanks, then go to sow;
Our blessings are assured to grow.
We are not known by what we keep;
We're known by deeds that others reap.

***Unison Prayer of Dedication**

O God of Prophets and Peacemakers: We are thankful for your blessings of encouragement as we, like Jesus, seek to correct injustices and come to the defense of those without voice.

Nourishment for the Journey

We forget, or deny, that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was as a political dissident. He came to shine a light on the powers that be for their corruption and robbery of the poor. For him, to be spiritual was to be political. He would have nothing to do with the now popular idea that spirituality is a personal thing one can do all by oneself. Spirituality had to reflect one's values – especially as expressed in, and for, the community.

To be spiritual, for Jesus, meant not turning a blind eye to the oppressed, nor to the oppressors and the system of unjust laws that impoverish people and then blame them for their poverty. He talked more about unjust economic and political realities than any other topic – by far.

His turning the tables in the temples was his indictment against the corruption and greed of those in power and the injustice of their methods that created, and further disadvantaged, the poor and powerless. Telling the money changers, "You have made (the Temple) a den of robbers," is clearly all about economic exploitation. But this offended Jesus' spirit and sense of decency, as he understood the values of how God wanted us to be in relationship with one another. When people are being cheated, this is a spiritual matter – going to the very heart of how we are to treat one another.

Spirituality for him was thus all that he was; including his relationships to others, the society, and its government and laws. He had no conception, as many do now, that you could believe one thing and act in another way. One's virtues and values influenced all that one perceived, thought, felt, said, and did. To say you value something but then act differently is not only hypocritical and cowardly, but reveals a complete lack of spiritual integrity.

And this is precisely why our society, and much of "American Christianity," totally misunderstands who Jesus was and the way he lived his life. We like to have it both ways, straddle the fence, and see Jesus as a comforting bosom to rest ourselves rather than a disquieting social justice advocate who prods us to protest – with voice, with finances, and even with our lives.

The willingness to put one's life on the line for the cause of justice, to show that one's love for people and their fair treatment is worth the risk of death itself, is what Jesus revealed by his life and his crucifixion. For Jesus, it is better to stand opposed to injustice than to be silent and complicit with it – even if it means giving up one's life for the cause. To cower in fear at the threats of the powerful is to lose one's soul. The only way to gain life in the midst of such vile injustice may be to lose it.

Jesus didn't die, as many falsely understand, as a sacrifice necessitated by God for the redemption of our sins. That would make God out to be an evil tyrant – one who would incite injustice on an innocent one so as to create justice for the many guilty ones, something antithetical to all that Jesus taught by word and deed as he came to the defense of the powerless time and time again. The blind man, leper, woman at the well, man possessed, and woman caught in adultery were all the outcasts of society. He did not ignore them to come to the aid of the majority, but rather attended to them specifically because they were the ones who were most affected by the injustices of society.

Rather, Jesus chose to live and die to bring light to the cause of justice in the face of barbaric injustice. His way is to be our way. We, too, are called to take up our own crosses raised against the injustices of our society. Jesus didn't say "praise me and live" but "follow me" and, if necessary, die

for these values that were in me that can be in you as well. The saving grace of Jesus is not that he died for our sins, but died showing us how not to sin.

We aren't saved because of what he did on the cross, but by how he lived his life when faced with the cross. He'd rather die doing the right thing than live doing the wrong thing. His words that those who lose their life for his sake will gain it are illuminating. "For his sake" means by his own values, not merely a profession of belief in him. And the word "belief" when he says "believe in me," actually means "have faith/trust in my way." It is not the person of Jesus who saves, but rather his spiritual virtues and ethical character traits. Many have gotten this wrong, choosing an easier "Christianity" rather than the disciplined path of Jesus.

When we live by his same values and virtues, we too are saved from a life in which we are complicit with injustice, sinfulness, greed, and the love of power. The power of Jesus lies not in his suffering on the cross, but in his flourishing with compassion in all of his relationships.

It was his forgiveness and compassion, even for his persecutors, that revealed the way of spiritual salvation; not some cosmic decision by God to make Jesus endure torture and torment as some sort of sadistic and accountability-denying expiation for other people's evils. We all have to take responsibility for ourselves, according to Jesus. We must follow him, not merely offer lip-service to him.

How did we allow ourselves to think that being a Christian, a follower of Christ, was an easy thing? Something we could live as we choose within our own culture, and simply believe the right things without actually living the right kind of life? This is not Jesus' view. It is the opposite of his view. If we are to "spiritually" live, then we must do so by the values we are willing to profess not just with our lips but by our actions.

We call it "Holy Week," and often think about what Jesus "did for us" long ago. But perhaps we should rename it "Scary Week," for it is when we must confront whether we are willing to go to our own proverbial Calvary with him – not to see what he will do for us, but to do what we can for others by showing them, as he did, that it is how you live, not what you believe, that makes the difference.

We may complain when our government gives handouts to the least fortunate with our tax dollars. But Jesus calls us to give "all" that we have for the sake of the poor and oppressed. "Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor," he tells us. But more than this, more than giving away all of our possessions, economic comfort, and financial security, he asks us to give our very lives.

We don't want to believe that he was serious about this. We deny that he was political at all, much less that he asked of us to perform the most political act of all – to lay down our lives for others...to love them as we would want to be loved.

Who amongst us if we were oppressed terribly would not feel the greatest of awe and gratitude for one who would come to our defense, even laying down his/her own life for the cause of our liberation?...who would stand up to despots, warhawks, bullies, and greedy oligarchs who benefitted at the expense of the least of these?

It is easier to think it is being faithful to Jesus and his way to simply play nice and pray for the welfare of those suffering. But Jesus asks us to do much more. He asks us to lay down our own lives, if necessary, to create justice in this world.

This is what true love is – to lay down our lives for our friends, the poor, the oppressed, and the afflicted. It is to put ourselves in harm's way of the powers that be: either overturning systemic laws of injustice, or dying in trying to do so. There is no other option to be a faithful Christian. We either serve God's ways, or mammon's ways. We can't have it both ways; as much as we try to convince ourselves that we can.

This is what "American Christianity" tries to deny – which is why it is nothing like the way of Jesus. We'd rather believe in a "prosperity gospel" than a Gospel that tells us we may need to give up our bodies to save our souls. We have become too comfortable and apolitical. We've forgotten Jesus – as he really was. — Pastor Bret, 3/16-17/2016

Continue Our Lenten Discipline? *We have been doing random acts of kindness and intentional deeds of compassion during Lent to make a positive difference in our community. Would you like to continue these activities into Easter or beyond? Please let Pastor Bret know your thoughts on this.*



Welcome to all first-time (and returning) guests to Faith UCC! We would like to get to know you and for you to get to know us. Join us after worship for coffee and conversation. There is free parking on Sundays at the meters and at the McAllister & Pugh Street parking garages – so, we hope you'll worship with us again next Sunday!

Electronic Giving Options: During the offering time in the service, you may place your offerings on the plates the ushers will bring around. If you prefer to give electronically simply **scan the QR code** with your smart phone to be directed to our online donation page.



April Special Offering

Hoffman Homes for Youth serves boys and girls ages 6 to 18 with mental health diagnoses by providing behavioral and cognitive therapy, physical health care services, education, spiritual nurturing and a safe and comfortable home for up to 141 children.

Make checks payable to Faith UCC with "Hoffman Homes" noted in the memo line.



- **April 13** **Maundy Thursday, Worship Service 7PM**
- **April 14** **Good Friday, Ecumenical Services @ State College Presbyterian Church**
- **April 16** **Easter**
- **April 23** **Second Sunday of Easter, Colin Ruffner Recital**
- **April 29** **Earth Day Movie, Meal, & Meaningful Conversation**

Get In Touch with Us!

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Church Office Hours: 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Fridays

Please make an appointment with Rev. Myers if you would like to meet with the pastor. You may call the church office, or his cell at 608-370-9472. Scripture Lessons for Worship Leader

Announcements and Upcoming Events



The Iron Bridge Dinner Theatre, *Central PA's Premiere Professional Dinner Theatre Experience*, is proud to present THE ARK, a comedic yet thoughtful look at the trials, tribulations and joy found in the journey that Noah and his family endured. Playing now through April 30th, we bring to the stage this endearing musical comedy that is sure to be an audience favorite!

Visit our website, www.ironbridgetheatre.com, for more information about the theatre, group rates, show times and more. If you have any questions please call [814-505-2551](tel:814-505-2551) or email ironbridgeinfo@gmail.com.



The Easter SERRV shop will be available in Romig Hall after worship on 3/26, 4/2 and 4/9, offering Easter-themed Fair Trade chocolates, decorations and gift items.



Join us for State College's second annual Palm Sunday Peace Walk!

This 1 mile walk starting at 3pm **this afternoon** will begin at University Baptist & Brethren Church and visit five stops along the way to hear voices of peace from our community and pray for peace and healing in our divided world. We will end at St. Paul's United Methodist Church for a simple soup meal together.

All are welcome to participate in this walk regardless of faith traditions.



On Saturday, April 29 at 7:00pm, critically acclaimed Canadian faith-based drama troupe, Theatre of the Beat, will be presenting ***This Will Lead to Dancing***, a play about wholeness, belonging, and LGBTQ inclusion at at University Baptist and Brethren Church (411 S Burrowes St, State College).

Admission is free; donations gladly accepted. All are welcome to come for a thought provoking theatre experience that explores this conversation through creativity, humour & sincerity.

Day: Today

Time: 12 PM

Location: HUB-Robeson Center

Price: \$15 for Adults, \$10 for under 18

You will receive: T-shirt, food/snacks after the race, prizes for top placers

<http://psuhabitatforhumanity.weebly.com/>

