



# *Cochrane Street United Church*

*(in Partnership with St. James United Church)*



## Message for March 24, 2024; Palm Sunday

Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft at Joint St. James/Cochrane Street United Church Service

Throughout these weeks of Lent, our readings have helped us to navigate our relationships, both affirming us and challenging us. Today we again need to consider our relationships but from a different angle, conscious of their importance as we move through Holy Week toward Easter.

We just recalled Jesus' so-called "triumphant entrance into Jerusalem" but how triumphant was it. It may feel like it as we processed around the sanctuary, singing "Hosanna" like the crowd did all those centuries ago. It's hard to call it a triumph though, not when as the poem we just read reminds us that after his arrival Jesus was arrested, tried and executed, the crowds turning from chants of "Hosanna" to shouts of "Crucify". As we consider this turn, I pray we keep our relationships in mind, including those we share with Jewish siblings. Too often preachers have claimed that the people were fickle, turning on Jesus in just a few days, a tragic assertion that reinforces anti-Semitism. We are seeing a rise in anti-Jewish rhetoric this year as people blur the line between criticizing the Israeli government and criticizing all Israelis, and from there moving to prejudice against all Jews. Islamophobia is also on the rise. Our relationship with both siblings requires caution as we reflect on the bible.

Besides it is also scripturally inaccurate. Jesus wasn't necessarily arrested in that first week in Jerusalem. While there he spent time in the Temple where he not only shared a vision of God's Reign of love but came into conflict with authorities who had a different view of God than him. As we hear readings that remind us of that conflict, remember that the gospels aren't histories but spiritual reflections. They likely collapse down into a few days a much longer time period. Plus, the accounts don't say it was the same crowd. Those who praised Jesus were likely the poor, the disenfranchised, understandably crying out "Hosanna, save us" in hope that Jesus came to lead a political revolt. Now some of the same group may have joined with another crowd, disillusioned when the uprising did not come, but the people most calling for Jesus' death were those in power, those who'd aligned themselves with the Romans, those whose livelihoods depended on them.

And though that particular allegiance was two millennia ago, we can be like that. I know I can as I look at my relationships with a calculating eye, reluctant to let go of my comfort to stand in solidarity with another. Our readings earlier in the month reminded us of just how easily we can fall into that. Despite that, Jesus chose to be in solidarity with us, his embrace of all that followed in today's readings and those we will hear later this week, revealing a profound commitment to love. This is where we can look to him, modelling how he related to others rather than what we normally do. There's a pattern most of us follow. We compare ourselves to others, copy them, feel jealous of them, come into conflict with them, condemn them. We project our hurts and fears onto them, judging others rather than ourselves. And when we do we often use devotion to God to justify it. Jesus didn't do this. Instead, he took this sinful pattern to himself, absorbing the anger rather than passing it on. He showed us what love looks like, inviting us to live likewise.

I invite you to keep all of this in mind as you pray through the rest of today's service and attend the services at Gower and Wesley in preparation for Easter, both the Vigil here and the morning services at both churches, to hold in your heart how Jesus was faithful to God's love. May we follow his example, finding inspiration in the events we recall in these next days, finding courage to be as faithful.