

To our Sisters and Brothers of Zion Lutheran Church,

As we write this letter, people around the world enter another week of the “new normal” necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic: continued social distancing, frequent hand-washing and sanitizing, and new routines for communicating with one another to stay connected. Through it all, our loving God remains with us. We might find God’s comforting presence in moments of quiet prayer, a beautiful sunset, the hint of Spring as trees begin to bud, or in the acts of quiet heroism demonstrated day after day by people all around us, and all around the world. The words of the hymn, *Be Not Afraid*, played by Mary Senn in our sanctuary during many services, might be a comfort. “Be not afraid, I go before you always, come, follow me, and I will give you rest.” As we find moments of peace and respite in these challenging days, please pass them along to others, especially those feeling greater vulnerability.

Developments and updates for you:

We hope you were able to participate in one of the three remote or virtual services last weekend. As a reminder, they are available again this Sunday, Palm Sunday:

1. A virtual service at Zion. Utilize the Service of the Word template provided in last week’s mailing again this Sunday. Following this letter, you will find the Palm Sunday readings, a wonderful sermon from our supply pastor, Rev. Janet Hoover, and Prayers of the People.
2. A Zoom remote service from Our Saviour Lutheran Church here in Utica, with our Transition Pastor, Rev. Anita Mohr, serving as the celebrant. This service takes place on Sundays at 10:00 AM. You can access this service via a Zoom app (free at your app store) with the meeting ID # 371 043 6068 - <https://n thrive.zoom.us/j/3710436068>. Last week’s service at Our Saviour can be found at: https://n thrive.zoom.us/rec/share/2u13EK6o9GdlaM_qtm_wRah7AlvIT6a8gCgf_6EJy0_iBQo76rvh7SFDD6M9tclF
3. A livestream service offered at Unity Lutheran Church in Wisconsin, former church of Kim and Jeff Ritchie. This service takes place at 10:30 EST/9:30 CST and can be accessed at the following link: <https://unitybrookfield.org/livestream.php>

Our call volunteers will be in touch with all members of the congregation again this week unless you let us know you’d prefer less frequent (or no) calls. Please convey any prayer requests that you would like included in our weekly Prayers of the People for Zion’s remote service.

At the March 9 meeting, our church council voted unanimously to continue paying all Zion staff members for their typical hours had the pandemic not occurred. For some, the pandemic restrictions have resulted in a reduction of hours staff are allowed to work. This was not of their choosing. As payroll is our largest budget expenditure, your continued stewardship support is greatly needed and appreciated.

Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth will be serving as our supply pastor for Easter Sunday. For those able to access a computer, iPad, or smart phone, Rev. Jen will be offering a Zoom remote service at 10:00 AM. We will send instructions for participating in this service in next week’s mailing.

The church office remains closed until it is safe to return. We continue to collect mail at the New Hartford post office twice per week. If you would like to communicate with the office/Sara, please send a letter to her via Zion Lutheran Church, 630 French Rd., New Hartford, NY 13413, or leave a message on Zion's webpage (www.zionlutheranNy.org).

Celebrating birthdays this week are Gloria Cifonelli and Bonnie Loomis (March 30), Darlene Hill (April 2), Beverly Besler (April 4), and Norm Glista (April 5). Next time you are in the shower or walking in the woods, sing an enthusiastic chorus of Happy Birthday to all our birthday friends!

As you know, this Sunday is Palm Sunday. While we won't be physically together in church and able to wave our palms to symbolically welcome Jesus, a wonderful idea was shared on the internet as an alternative, which we would offer for your consideration.

“What if everyone on Sunday, April 5 in the morning, puts a branch on the door of their house or on the window to celebrate Palm Sunday? It could be any green branch you can get. This would help, despite the social distancing, to be connected as we enter into the Holiest of Weeks. We may be physically isolated, but not separated. We are united as the body of Christ. We*are*the*Church. “

Bob and Bonnie Loomis had arranged for palms to be delivered to Zion for this weekend's Palm Sunday service, “For the Glory of God and to honor Sara Silva, Zion's Office Manager”. Sara has been doing a wonderful job under especially difficult circumstances. We join with Bob and Bonnie in conveying our great appreciation to Sara. Thanks, Bob and Bonnie. Thank you, Sara! Once the palms arrive, they will be dried out and then arranged in vases for display in the Zion entryway. When we return to the building, the palms will be available for the congregation members to enjoy and display at home.

The Board of Directors of Your Neighbors (YN) announced late last week that, for the foreseeable future, they were suspending their services of food delivery and medical appointment transport due to a variety of factors, including concern for the safety and well-being of their volunteers in this time of COVID-19. **These services will continue to be provided by the Office of the Aging**, now able to meet these needs due to recently increased funding and volunteers. This decision was made in collaboration and communication with the Office for the Aging and Lutheran Care. YN started 42 years ago and continued until this past Friday as an ecumenical effort of Utica area churches to fill existing gaps in services. Although not a Zion specific program, our church has been strongly affiliated with YN for its entire history, with Carole Grove and several other Zion members playing key roles. Thank you, Carole, and other YN volunteers! We will keep Zion congregants advised should YN return in the future to address other needed services.

While the Your Neighbors program has suspended its services for the time being, the demand on local food banks in the Utica area remains high. At present, 16 food pantries are operating in our area. Your donations of food remain important. Ed Grove brings food donations made at Zion to several of these pantries. Until it is safe to be out on the roads to drop off food, consider making a monetary donation on-line to one of these food pantries. A Google search of Utica Area food pantries will generate a list of these pantries, and several include instructions for donating on-line.

The Council identified and solicited the participation of eight members to represent Zion in the call process for a new pastor. Once each person agrees to join the Call committee, the committee will meet via Zoom. We are hopeful the committee will begin to meet in April to discuss our pastoral needs and Zion's future. Council is meeting with Pastor Anita Mohr and Dean Wolling for guidance.

To close, we can find wisdom in a wide variety of places, sometimes even from the mouths of children. (Some of us might remember Art Linkletter's "Kids Say the Darndest Things" TV show from a few years back.) There was a quote attributed to an anonymous 6-year-old in a recent post by his teacher on Facebook. The quote, "Anyone can be a family, you just have to love each other and feed each other." Let us continue to "feed" one another with love, support, kindness, and yes, maybe even a donation to a local food bank. Take good care this week!

With appreciation for our Zion family,
Mark Thompson and Kristen Burson
Church council co-presidents



Palm Sunday – April 5, 2020

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take on our nature and to suffer death on the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE WORD

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9

Second Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel: Matthew 26:14-27:66

Sermon *Hosanna, Loud Hosanna* –Rev. Janet E. Hoover

The crowd gathered on that first Palm Sunday didn't understand what was happening.

They came with varied motives and desires...

Hope and fear,

Anger and anticipation, Worry and wondering.

And what did they discover?

Instead of a mighty king mounted on a white stallion, they saw a travel-worn man mounted on a little donkey that left his feet dragging in the dust. No aspect of his life fit a royal profile.

What kind of king walks to work?

Sleeps beneath the stars?

Lives among the poor?

Fills his calendar with lepers, sinners, children?

But Jesus entered Jerusalem that day with courage and the resolve to demonstrate God's great love no matter the price he might pay. Most likely what the crowd saw wasn't what they expected. This year's Palm Sunday isn't what we expected either. We anticipated palm branches and a full sanctuary with songs of Hosanna filling the air. Instead we sit in our homes, emotions swirling around us...

Emotions of hope and fear, Anger and anticipation,

Worry and wondering. Even reading about the crowds gathering in Jerusalem sounds odd to our ears as we live with social distancing and quarantines.

So what are we to make of this text?

What are we to do without our palms to wave? Well, we may not be surrounded with green fronds, But we have branches to wave and songs to sing. We can welcome Christ into our lives with shouts of acclamation. What is a palm branch you can lift high? It may be calling a friend or family member to let them know that someone cares. It may be sending a thank-you to a health care worker or grocery store clerk or trash collector. It may be speaking kindly to those who share your space. It may be speaking out for those who can't speak for themselves. It may be doing good that will receive no applause. Our palm branches this year are composed of acts of kindness and words of hope and songs of trust in our God who has promised to love us always. These are challenging times filled with difficulties and pain and hardship. But these troubles do not define us as long as we allow ourselves to be shaped and formed by God's hands of goodness and grace. When anxieties mount, When worries threaten to flatten our joy, When pain and darkness sweep us into the spiraling chaos, When we are afraid-- We can hold on to Jesus. We can use these times to draw nearer to God. We can fill our days not with anxious checking of the latest headline, But by immersing ourselves in Scripture and prayer. We can sing hymns, even if only in our shower. And we can listen. Even in the midst of the storm, a voice can be heard. Echoing out of the darkness it sings:

"Be not afraid. I am with you always Nothing can separate you from my love." We sometimes think Hosanna means something along the lines of-- Way to go Jesus! Or Hooray! Or, as we said in Oklahoma, Yee Haw! But Hosanna actually means save us. Save Us! It is our acknowledgment that we can't save ourselves, but that God does. God comes to us in the midst of our fear and worry; breathing hope into all the dead and dried out places of our lives-- Energizing, encouraging, enlivening. This year we've been given the gift of looking beyond the usual festivities of Palm Sunday to hear with unstopped ears the melody of love that weaves its way through the centuries into our hearts. We are never alone. Jesus sees us if we're in crowded sanctuaries or the quiet of our living room, Jesus sees us in hospitals and nursing homes. Jesus sees us as we work and as we wish we were working. Jesus sees us wherever we are through eyes of love. He sees our weakness and worry; He sees our courage and our hope. He sees us just as we are and loves us. And so, we can lift our voices with the saints of all the ages saying: Hosanna! Praise to the Lord! Bless Him who comes to bring us salvation!

Prayers of Intercession

Listen to the cries of your people waiting patiently for your healing hand and comforting Spirit especially: those who suffer with chronic pain and all cancer patients, Lydia, Pr. Mary Etta, Paul, Gail, Fran K, Edie Marie, Suzee, Michael Gilleece and family, Donna B., Debbie, David H., Linda W. & family, Dave, Jordan, Alison, Theresa, Barbara C., residents of the Presbyterian Home, Ed & family, Paul Van Allen. For the Students, Teachers, Doctors, Nurses, and first responders on the front lines, that the light of Christ may shine upon them with hope. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

"And without warning, our focus on things faded, and all that really mattered was what kind of human we decided to be." JM Storm

