



humble and riding on an ass and on the colt, the foal of an ass. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off. And He shall command peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your captives free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold oh prisoners of hope. Today, I declare that I will restore to you double." Will the congregation please rise and stand for the reading of the gospel. The gospel lesson is taken from the book of Luke chapter 19. "When He drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of his disciples saying, "Go into the village opposite, where on entering, you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, why are you untying it, you shall say the Lord has need of it." So those who were sent went away and found it as He had told them. And as they were untying, the colt its owners said to them, "Why are you on tying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." And they brought it to Jesus and throwing their garments on the colt, they sat Jesus upon it. And as He rode along, they spread their garments in the road. And as He was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olivet, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying "Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." And some of the pharisees in the multitude said to Him, "Teacher rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."" Here, ends the reading of the lesson. May the Lord add His blessing. (choir singing harmoniously) ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Let us affirm our faith. We are not alone, we live in God's world. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in the true man Jesus to reconcile and make new. Who works in us and others by His spirit. We trust Him, He calls us to be His church, to celebrate His presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen, our judge and our hope in life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us, we are not alone. Thanks be to God. The Lord be with you.

- And with you too.

- Let us pray. Oh God, creator, sustainer, and Redeemer. How wonderful it is today to affirm the many people who love Jesus and who met Him with waving palms on His entry into Jerusalem. Our love for you and Him makes our identity with that loving crowd very strong. We rejoice in the opportunity of a day like this, in which we can say how very much we love you and Jesus and all your other daughters and sons. We are caught up in the spirit of the festive day. However, this festive day is not only a Lenten day, but also the day before Holy Week. And this adds another dimension to our loving praise. We are praising and rejoicing in the midst of penance. And we are penitential for who we have been for others in the world. We never are able to do all we can for others. And so we lift in love to you, those for whom we have not done enough. We lift in love to you the hungry, the ill-clothed, the ill-housed, those without the basic survival needs. We lift in love to you the sick and lonely, the young and old, those whom we often tend to ignore. We lift in love to you, the victims of racism and sexism and other oppressions. Those whom we see as angry and often hostile. We lift in love to you those who are experiencing the pain of dying or the grief of a loss, those for whom we often have no words. We lift in love to you our beloved ones, our families and friends, those to whom we often give very little of ourselves. And finally we lift in love to you ourselves, for whom we have

little love and caring. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, who though loved by many, was also forsaken by many. And who taught us to pray, 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

- Grace to you and peace from God the father and His son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. I can imagine it was a day just like today, not quite as cold, but a beautiful day, warm, perhaps even hot, sunny, wind swept, and the crowd, the multitude gathered and why not? No wonder that the crowd gathered. No wonder that the people yelled and raved and exclaimed over His coming back home to Jerusalem to celebrate with His brothers and sisters of the Jewish tradition, the great Passover Feast, which is also now being celebrated by our Jewish brothers and sisters today. Surely the people would turn out in full force. Jesus was the king, the king of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one who fulfilled the prophecy of the old Testament. The Jewish people had looked for Him as the Messiah for 20 generations or perhaps even more, the Savior, the Redeemer, the one who would restore Israel, and here He came down the road. Why not wave palm branches? Why not throw garments on the road and yell, "Hosanna blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to the son of David, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." Yes, why not? He had made women and men whole by forgiving their sins. He had healed the paralytics, the lame, the blind, the bleeding and the sick. He had raised the dead. He had preached the word of God, prophetically and authentically. He had stood against tradition and authority. And for persons, He had brought them into the kingdom of God and showed them what the kingdom of God was really like. Why not exclaim? The king who fulfilled the scriptures. And there they were, the family and friends of Jairus' daughter, whom He had raised from death. The friends from Cana of Galilee, whose wedding feast He had richly enlivened. The customers of Joseph the carpenter who had known Him since he was a boy. The friends and family of Lazarus, His friend, whom He had raised from the dead. The man from Gadarene, who had been filled at one time with demons. The woman taken in adultery, who heard Jesus say, "Let him, who is without sin, cast the first stone on this woman." The woman at the well. The woman who touched His garment. Simon's mother-in-law one of the first persons Jesus healed. The woman of the city who poured ointment on Him and who heard Him say, "Your faith has made you whole go in peace." The crowd, or crowds, who had heard the sermon on the Mount all together or in its many parts, what preaching they had heard. The leper. Those made whole by forgiveness of their sins, the paralytic, His mother and others in His own family, Mary and Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, Zachias, all there thrilled, excited, yelling, "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." I wonder if these folks ever heard a song like Wallace Hornbrook's, "Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley." I'm sure they did. Because there's a song that goes, "The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me down to lie. My soul, He doeth restore again. Even though I walked through death's dark veil. I fear no ill. Thy rod and staff, they comfort still." Jesus walked this lonesome valley. He had to walk by Himself. Listen, feel, hear, let the words touch you when the choir sings this Anthem in just a few minutes, because I'm convinced that these people were there for many reasons, but one reason many of them were there is that Jesus transformed their lonesome valley into a valley with a presence of concern. This is the message that the stones would cry out. There is a truth here that will not be silenced. There is a truth here that all nature knows, even those dead stones. There is a message here that God wants proclaimed. There is a word here that must be spoken, hear it, know it, believe it, Luke writes. Jesus has walked this lonesome

valley. Your lonesome valley and mine, He has walked it with us. This Jesus with us, dear daughters and sons of God is God Emmanuel, God with us. Here is the message the stones would cry out, God is in Christ Jesus walking this lonesome valley of life today, with us. And life is a lonesome valley for all of us, sometime. Robert and Taylor Campus minister at the university of Illinois, writes about the frame of mind that a student may find himself in at times, he says some gray morning, when he hasn't seen his girl for a month, when his roommate is depressed, and an exam is around the corner, he may bitterly question whether he has anything other than a statistic and cry out. "Does anybody really care?" This lonesome valley. Or you may identify with the little old gray haired lady I saw sitting in the airport in Atlanta one day, the crowds swirled around her, people running to and fro, noise and conversation and hustle and bustle filled the air. And she sat over in the corner blank expression on her face, looking empty, heartsick and weary, this lonesome valley. Or listen to the plaintive words of another elderly lady. She was one of a group of five women that I saw at a local restaurant having dinner one evening, obviously celebrating her birthday. And in the midst of the gaiety, I overheard her as she stopped with a painful look on her face and said, "Well, I hope we're all here this time next year," lonesome valley. Or here are the words of the Brooklyn college co-ed when she said, "If people are right in telling me that these are the best years of my life, I'm not so sure I wanna stay around for the rest," lonesome valley. Maybe the real message of Palm Sunday will come through if we look to see how Jesus walked through this lonesome valley. Jesus walked through this lonesome valley, caring. He cared for others. He cared throughout His life. He cared for the blind whom He made to see. He cared for the paralytic, whom He forgave and made to walk. He cared for the leper whom He cleansed and made whole. He cared for the prostitute whom He received as a real person. He cared for Lazarus and His family with whom He wept. He cared for a little child and said, we should all become as little children. He cared for the thief with whom He'd die. He cared for His mother, as He died. Jesus cared about persons and He cared about them, one by one. Today, I'm afraid we are too accustomed to thinking large numbers, hundreds, thousands, maybe even millions, but to Jesus the Christ, it is the one who counts. For when someone hurts, she hurts as one, not as a multitude. When someone is lonely, he is lonely as one, not as a crowd. When someone is sad, she is sad as one, and not as many. When someone is dying, he faces his death, not that of the masses. To the caring Christ, it is the one who really counts. And so it should be for those of us who call ourselves by the name of Jesus Christ. Collin Morris writes in his little book, "Include Me Out!" About the church, "This whole massive structure we call a church," he writes "With all its history, theology and worship, and witness is a great pyramid on a point, all of this is meant to be brought to focus upon any one person's need. That is what all the singing and praying and bishops and sacraments and preaching is about. It is about the paramount significance to God, of a single human being. And if we fail in meeting that single human beings need, we fail in everything." All of this church, singing this choir, this place here where we gather today, praying, giving, building all the other paraphernalia, all of this is to be brought to focus upon any one person's need, and just to show the great significance to God of one human being. Oh the tenderness, the compassion, the care, the love, the concern that God has for one person. Sound absurd? Sure it does, surely it does. Unless your little child is the one who needs the healing hand of the doctor, and then one person is very important. Or unless it is your mother who has become husbandless and she needs comfort and understanding, and then one person becomes very important. Or unless it is your roommate who has failed to get into law school or med school, or who has received a dear John, or who has found out that she is going to have a baby, and then one person is very important. The love and tenderness of God and His concern and care for one person is like that of the little old lady who knocked on

the preacher's study door one Sunday morning, about two minutes before 11 o'clock and the preacher opened the door. And the little old lady was standing there with a tiny fluttering bird in her hands. And she said, "He was hurt and I had to pick him up." And the preacher said, "Oh yes, that's nice of you Mrs. Jones, I'm sorry about the little bird." And he hurried off to the sanctuary for the worship service. And reflecting later, the preacher said, "Oh, if only I had had sense enough to let that little old lady preach the sermon that day, to let her stand in the pulpit and just open up her hands and show everybody, how much she cared for a little old bird." The love and care and concern of God is just like that. In his little book entitled "Meditations in Universe," Paul Monka says, "When all is said, nothing is done." And too many of us are sayers, talkers, word mongers, and not doers, carers, lovers. Preachers are taught to talk, to preach, and not really to listen. Professors are trained to tell, and always not to hear from others. Students are instructed to deal with content, not always to care about persons. The engineering student or med student or law student or divinity student or education student is taught skills and methods and materials, and not often helped to be sensitive to people. Oh, how we need carers today. This is a lonesome valley. This is what that changed list expression of the coed says, as she walks from one side of this campus, to the other, never changing expressions and often never even looking up. This is what the senior in his last semester means when he says, "I really don't know what I'll do four graduate schools have turned me down I don't know, even know where I'm going to get a job," lonesome valley. This is what the first semester, mid year freshmen says, when he remarks, "This place is cold, it's unfriendly, it's hard to feel at home here." This is what the senior citizen means when she says to me, "Bob, you haven't been to see me in a long time." This is what the young faculty member means when he says, "I've been coming to the chapel regularly for months now, but I don't know anybody there yet." Lonesome valley. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "The church is truly the church only when it exists for others." Jesus cared. This is a lonesome valley, but God is present. This is what the incarnation is all about. That God comes in His fullness to in all of our all. This is what the crucifixion is all about. That there are death filling, moments of anxiety and fear and despair for all of us, but God is there. This is what the resurrection is all about, that God comes to us in any death moment or fear moment and despair moment and brings us to life again. But it's fleeting. Karl Harmonie reminds us, "It's time we really face this harsh reality," he says, "Truth is seldom wholly nice, and faith is never wholly certain for more than a moment at a time. Faith has to deal to live with contradictions and uncertainty and death. Faith is a gamble, not a reason deduction. Faith is puzzled by this life." Lonesome valley, but God is there. This week we have remembered the life of Martin Luther king Jr. On the occasion, the sad occasion of the sixth anniversary of his assassination, his last sermon, like many others had some powerful words in it. Perhaps though as we read them now they have more meaning to us because we know what he did not know at the time, namely that death was just a few hours away for him. The last paragraph of his last sermon includes these words, "Well, I don't know what will happen now, we've got some difficult days ahead, but it really doesn't matter to me now because I've been to the mountain top, and I don't mind. Like anybody. I would like to live a long life, longevity has its place, but I'm not concerned about that now, I just want to do God's will. And He has allowed me to go up to the mountain and I've looked over and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land, so I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything, I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." No wonder they stood and shouted, "Hosanna glory to God in the highest, our eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (orchestral music) (choir singing harmoniously) (orchestral music) ♪ Jesus

walked this lonesome valley ♪ ♪ He had to walk it by Himself ♪ ♪ Oh, nobody else could walk it for Him ♪ ♪ He had to walk it by Himself ♪ ♪ We must walk this lonesome valley ♪ ♪ We have to walk it by ourselves ♪ ♪ Oh, nobody else can walk it for us ♪ ♪ We have to walk it by ourselves ♪ ♪ You must go and stand your trial ♪ ♪ You have to stand it by yourself ♪ ♪ Oh, nobody else can stand it for you ♪ ♪ You have to stand it by yourself ♪ ♪ You have to stand it by yourself ♪ ♪ You have to stand it by yourself ♪ (orchestral music) (choir singing harmoniously) ♪ Amen ♪

- Oh, God of who's gifts we have all received, accept this offering of your people. Remember in your love those who have brought it and those for whom it is given. And so follow it with your blessing that it may promote peace and justice among all people. Amen. (orchestral music) (choir singing harmoniously) Please be seated. Go out in peace to serve God and your neighbor in all that you do. The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is with you always. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (bells chiming) (orchestral music)