

# Spring Cleaning

MJCF

April 5, 2020

ヨハネ John 12:12-19, エペソ Ephesians 5:8 – 14, (Zechariah 9:9)

Well, this is my first online sermon! Afterward, I can send copies for anyone who might miss today's message. I'm combining themes of confession and Palm Sunday. Today is Palm Sunday, the day that Jesus came into Jerusalem, sitting on a donkey. People waved palm branches and shouted praise, saying "Hosanna! [Meaning, 'Save us!'] Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord - the King of Israel!" The crowd had expected Jesus to be the one to overthrow the Roman rulers and free them from oppression. But, Jesus turned out to not be the Saviour they'd expected. He was humble, coming in peace, sitting on a donkey rather than riding on a warhorse. He was actually King, but not in the worldly sense. He came to save us from sin. His purpose was not to save everyone so that they'd never experience any more hardship, though. He knew that in less than a week the shouts of praise would turn to jeers and shouts of "Crucify him!" We may think that we would never be part of the group that went against Jesus, but if we'd actually been there, not knowing about the resurrection, I wonder... To be honest, I imagine I would have, unfortunately, given up on Jesus if I saw that he was arrested and condemned to death.

During this time of "Lent," as we prepare to celebrate Easter next week, it's a good time to do some spiritual "spring cleaning." What areas of our lives do we need to honestly face? In what areas do we need to repent and change, allowing Jesus to clean out some of the cobwebs of sin? Is God calling you to let go of something that you've been holding onto? Well, these days, with the coronavirus turning things upside-down, we need to all stay home. We are forced to think again about what is important in our lives. It's a good time to focus on some spring cleaning in our hearts. We all have areas of sin and darkness. It's time to open ourselves up to the light of Christ so that we can see and admit those areas where we fall short. Often, we need to let go of some things that get in the way of our walk with Jesus.

It's like the pioneers during the North American Great Depression. There was a terrible drought, and because nothing was growing in the prairies, people had to load up whatever they had onto horse-drawn wagons and migrate west. It was a difficult journey and many died along the way. There was only so much that they could take along, and many realised that they had to let go of some things along the way. Too much weight would slow everything down, potentially making it impossible to get to their destination. Travelling the same paths, years later, people found household items that had been dropped along the way, things the pioneers had to let go of, in order to keep going; things such as a "cast iron cooking stove, a wooden chest, a handmade cradle..." In a similar way, we may need to let go of some things in order to lighten our journey with Jesus. I enjoy watching a lot of movies on TV, especially these days, stuck at home. But, I realise that sometimes I spend too much time on my own, and forget that God calls me to also spend time with family members. I've sometimes sensed God's call for me to spend more time and energy connecting with other people through phone calls, or getting together. (I guess, these days it would just be through things like phone calls and email). In what area is God inviting you to make a change?

It may even mean that we need to drop something good in order to follow God's call to something better. I love reading books, thinking that the knowledge I gain can help others, but I realise that if I spend all my time reading, the knowledge just goes into me and not out to actually help others. I need a balance between feeding myself and blessing others with what I've received. As we confess our sin, we allow more and more of Christ's light to shine. Now, I'd like to have a prayer of confession, together. I'll read the light print, and I invite you to respond when there is bold print:

**Prayer of Confession** written by Moira Laidlaw  
(based on John 12:12-19)

Lord Jesus Christ,

we praise you with heart and life and voice,  
not only with outward signs such as palm branches  
or the occasional “Hosanna”, but with lives truly turned towards you.  
It seems such a distance from this present day Palm Sunday  
to that day when you entered Jerusalem  
with the shouts of the crowd ringing in your ears.  
Welcomed as a king, yet riding on a lowly donkey.  
Greeted with cheers and acclamations  
which were so soon to turned to jeers and condemnation.  
From this side of the resurrection,  
we confidently believe that we could never have been  
part of the jeering crowd—but would we, if we had been there?

*(silent reflection)*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
when our words and actions reflect a reluctance  
to confess you publicly as Lord of our lives:

**Forgive us.**

When we fear that humbling ourselves, would be seen by others as weakness,  
or some kind of defect in our character:

**Forgive us.**

When we have betrayed your love for us through our lack of love for you,  
for others, and for ourselves :

**Forgive us.**

When we find ourselves glossing over the events of your passion and death  
because we look forward to Easter as a time to enjoy holidays and have fun.

**Forgive us.**

Lord Jesus Christ, fix your mind in us; and remake us in your likeness;  
empty us of all that hinders us from following you  
to where pain and suffering, exploitation and injustice exist.

**Gracious and loving God,  
empower us with the Holy Spirit  
so that our lives continually glorify you  
and our tongues forever confess Jesus as Lord.  
This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen**

**Assurance of Forgiveness (Philippians 2:6-8)**

Hear the good news:

*“Jesus, though he was in the form of God,  
did not count equality with God as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.”*

Through his obedience,  
we are therefore freed from whatever sin enslaves us.

**Thanks be to God!**

In our passage from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he talks about darkness and light. Darkness represents chaos. When God created the world, God created light out of the darkness of chaos, saying, "Let there be light!" And, the light of God's Son, Jesus Christ has now overcome the darkness of sin and death, through his sacrifice on the cross. The movement from darkness to light in this Ephesians passage has made it popular to use during services of baptism. Baptism represents going from an old life to a new one. And, the words, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" fit with the symbolism of baptism. A new believer becomes dead to sin, and rises to new life in Jesus Christ. Our passage goes as far as saying we were once darkness, but now (in the Lord) we are light. It's not by our own power, but by the Lord that we become lights. Through believing in him, we all become "little lights," children of the light. Earlier, Paul says that we have been saved by grace through faith, in chapter 2, verse 8. It's by believing. It has nothing to do with working hard to be good, or earning our rewards.

I'd like to come back to the idea of spring cleaning our hearts, of clearing out some of the things to which we've been hanging on, things that have been distracting us from a close walk with God. We might have trouble seeing the cobwebs of sin, but these days of staying at home may provide us with time to think again about our relationship with Christ. If we open our hearts to him in prayer, his light can show us where change is needed.

Our neighbours had been travelling outside of Canada and needed to quarantine themselves for two weeks after they got home. Near the end of their quarantine, I heard that they had done a lot of spring-cleaning, including cleaning all their windows – inside and out. It reminded me of a story of a school bus driver from Emmanuel Mennonite church in Abbotsford. He talked about how he was responsible to clean all 24 of his bus windows. But, no matter how clean he thought he had gotten the windows, on a sunny day, with the sun at a certain angle, he would still see spots and streaks. I sometimes see this kind of thing, looking through the windshield of our van. It's so hard to get it perfectly clean. In a similar way, we all have the stain of sin. We are all in need of the grace of Jesus Christ, the one who died on the cross so that we can be forgiven. Through him, our hearts are made pure, in God's sight. It's only through Christ that we can become truly clean. If we want to grow, we just need to take time to regularly confess those areas where we realise we've fallen short. Have you let fears burden you with worry rather than trust in God, our Creator? Have you focused too much on yourself and your own challenges, rather than giving enough care to someone else who needs encouragement? I know I have often done this. It's like tunnel-vision. I easily focus on my own struggles and things, and miss caring for people around me. These "so called" minor sins are like cobwebs and spots that build up on the windows. Little by little, my view of God becomes clouded. But, if I open up myself to Christ and confess my sins, he can do a spring cleaning in my heart. Sometimes it takes a while to learn what needs to be confessed, but we can start with admitting that we could have been one of the people who turned against Jesus. It begins when we work at honestly opening our hearts to the light of Christ. Let's pray.

Loving God, we praise you as ruler of all Creation. Thank-you for sending your Son, Jesus to show us your great love. Thank-you for showing us the humble way of peace and sacrificial love, rather than coming to crush all evil doers. We confess that had you come to punish all evil, no one would be able to stand before you. O Lord, grant us courage to be honest and open with you. Our spiritual spring-cleaning will never be complete without your work within us. May your light shine on us. Show us those areas that we need to confess, that we may more fully reflect your light, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.