

Hosanna in the highest!



Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

Luke 19:28-42

²⁸ After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

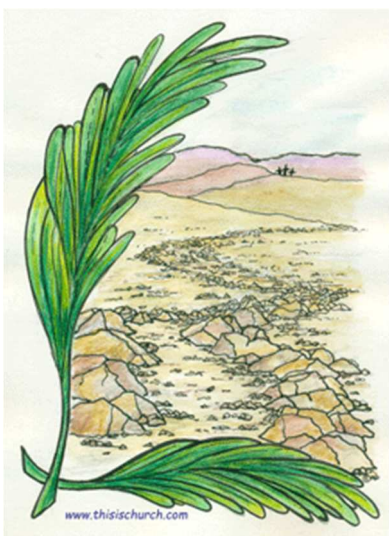
³⁸ “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”^[a]

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰ “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.



Prayers

As we go into this week, O God, help us to have a focus, a purpose that is beyond that of just getting by; beyond that of just trying to make it through another week; show us we pray what you would have us do; reveal to us our own personal and unique ministry—and help us to do it.

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those things which last for ever; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God, you are my rock, my rescue, and my refuge, I leave it all quietly to you. **Amen.** *George Appleton (1902-93)*

Bless O God those in our midst and those around the world whom we name in our hearts before you at this time; we especially ask for those who are poor in the basic needs of daily living; and for those who are poor in love; hear too the prayers we ask for those who need healing or hope in their lives, those who need justice, and those who require mercy.

Christ crucified draw you to himself, to find in him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope, and the assurance of sins forgiven; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**

A story and thought from Catherine of Siena (1347-80).

She was born near Tuscany, Italy. In the year following Catherine's birth, Siena was hit hard by the most ruinous pandemic the world has yet seen: the bubonic plague, or so-called Black Death, that devastated Europe during the fourteenth century. The plague's cause was unknown, and there was no cure. Death rates are difficult to determine at this distance, but many historians believe that Siena lost 60% of its inhabitants: 50,000 people were quickly and excruciatingly reduced to 20,000 people. As the plague swept through Europe during the period 1346–53, it killed as many as 50 million people, a full 60% of Europe's population. The plague burst out again in 1374, when Catherine was 27 years old. Catherine now stepped into the dangerous situation to tend to the sick and dying. Her theology is one of radical neighbourly love. Loving her neighbours brought her closer to God. We can see this in the *Dialogue*, in which she hears God saying, "When the two—that is love for me and love for your neighbour—are gathered together...you find that I am your companion, and I am your strength and security" (*Dialogue* 54). Catherine cared for the sick and elderly, at times performing tasks so awful she nearly vomited. But when she drew back she heard a voice telling her not to detest Christ in her neighbour, and she quickly re-embraced the work

What about us, on this day in April 2020, wherever you happen to be, as the COVID-19 pandemic unites and separates us all? If Catherine's social ethos cannot be separated from her spiritual life, neither can nor should ours. But Catherine rushed into the streets to care for the bodies of her neighbours, and we must stay home, stand apart. We are robbed of hugs, of holding hands, of the healing provided in affective touch. How can we show radical neighbourly love in our cultural moment, with our ensouled bodies?

We can begin by remembering that we are both soul and body, and that each precious life in our global community is both soul and body. We carry our bodies into our isolation and they require care: healthful food, exercise, deep breaths of fresh air, rest. Our bodies can still kneel in prayer though we cannot go to church, our arms still rise in praise because God remembers each of us, even now. When we emerge from our own small cells to purchase food or fill prescriptions we can remember that each person who continues to work to provide for our needs is both soul and body. Rather than encounter our neighbours as threats to our safety, suspicious just for being on the street, we can see them as souls and bodies, carrying weighty burdens of their own. For the time being we must keep our distance, but we can still look another in the eyes and smile.

And we can remember that the God who knit us together, body and soul, is the God who was present in fourteenth-century Italy as plague swept mercilessly through Siena's narrow streets, and the same God is present even now as we look out our windows onto newly quiet streets and pray for relief from this new virus.