



April 3, 2020

Dear Paragould FUMC,

I bring you greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 118 is appointed for this week's Palm Sunday. It reads in part,

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

The Gospels report the crowds at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem exclaiming, "Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" The crowds in Jerusalem were aching for relief from the violent and overwhelming Roman regime. So they cry unto Jesus, "Save us!" Though under different circumstances here in 2020, we look to Palm Sunday as we too cry unto God, "Save us!" Scripture bears witness to the frailty of the human experience and our hope in Jesus Christ. May it be so for us this week. Of course, you'll remember those crowds turned on Jesus when he did not lead them in the way they'd hoped. Perhaps those crowds were expecting a military takeover. Instead Jesus joined them in their lowliness even unto death. We might ask ourselves what sort of salvation we want from Jesus at this moment. Maybe a miracle? Wouldn't that be helpful! My sense is that Jesus is already saving us, though perhaps not in the ways we'd expect. Jesus is saving us through our intellect and humility. Scientific research is processed by our brains, but led by God's Spirit. Let us honor the salvation that is before us by bearing witness to the best evidence we have for defeating this virus: stay home and stay safe.

This week we received a letter from ARUMC Bishop Gary Mueller urging us to continue the suspension of in-person worship and meetings. This comes as a response to both federal and state governments extending social distancing requirements for the coming weeks. Your church leaders (Committee Chairs, Council Chair, Lay Leader, etc.) met Sunday evening and agreed we will support these requests in an effort to be good neighbors and partners in caring for our community. In-person worship and previously scheduled programs are postponed for now. Please hold in prayer those on the front lines of this virus including elected leaders, scientists, doctors, and healthcare providers local and beyond.

I want to thank you to those of you who have been engaging with us in online worship. We are streaming both our 9am and 11am services each Sunday with excellent feedback and engagement. Thank you! I also appreciate you supporting the church through mailing your offering or giving online (fumcparagould.org/giving). And I hope you are continuing to make your way to our resource page (fumcparagould.org/homebound) for all your faith-formation content. Now, let's talk about Holy Week:

Palm Sunday, April 5: You will stream worship at 9am and 11am as you have been the last couple weeks. Now, for something different! **At 10:15am we will meet in the church parking lot for a Downtown Palm Parade.** We will go West on Main St.; North on 7th.; East on Court St.; South on Pruett St.; then North on Main back to church. You will need to "Bring Your Own Palms" meaning *anything* green you can wave out your window. Led by the church bus, we'll make a lap around downtown, celebrating Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Roll the windows down and play music. We'll have a good time! This is aimed at our young ones who often lead us on Palm Sunday, though of course all ages are welcome. Come after the 9am service and/or you'll be home in time for the 11am service. If you come, you *MUST* maintain social distancing. The church will

not be open for restrooms or fellowship. Stay in your car and wave at one another! ... Later that evening, the Youth will meet at 7pm for a Zoom Social.

Children's Storytime, Monday, April 6, 7pm: Rev. Dane and his children Edith and Holden will meet you through the church's Facebook page for a live storytime and kids reflection on Holy Week.

Coping with COVID-19, Tuesday, April 7, 7pm: Again, we will meet through the church's Facebook page for a live conversation and reflection on the challenges of social isolation and anxiety. Professional counselors will share strategies for managing these strange days. I think this will be an especially helpful opportunity to be in ministry together.

Bible Study with Rev. Chase, Wednesday, April 8, 7pm: Chase will meet you on Facebook live for a time of Bible study in support of faith-formation during Holy Week. Rev. Chase will be working from John chapter 1, one of the most compelling passages in all of Scripture.

Maundy Thursday Love Feast, Thursday, April 9: We will **not** have a Maundy Thursday worship service via live stream. In lieu of a service of Holy Communion, I am encouraging you to celebrate a "Love Feast" in your own homes. Included here and posted at fumcparagould.org/homebound is a service of prayer to support your in-home celebration of Maundy Thursday. I realize this will be new to most of you and maybe a little awkward. But what an opportunity to share at-home spiritual disciplines. You can read more details in the attachment.

Good Friday, April 10, 7pm: You **will** stream the Good Friday service as you would the Sunday services. This will be a Tenebrae service focused on the Stations of the Cross images currently hanging in the Welcome Center. I am anticipating this being a somber, but helpful service as we meditate on the death of Jesus. The order of service will be posted online ahead of time at fumcparagould.org/homebound.

Easter Sunday, April 12: We will celebrate Easter Sunday through online services at 9am and 11am. Again, the order of service will be found online. Also, we are partnering with MOR Media to have our 11am service broadcast on their radio signals including 107.1FM. We appreciate their support! ... On Easter morning, we would typically expect to see countless friends and family gathered for worship. **Instead, this year we are inviting you to submit an "Easter Greetings" video or snapshot** of you and/or your family. We will compile them into one montage to be played online after the Easter services on Sunday. Like seeing others in the Welcome Center, we'll see one another via online video. Please email or text your video or image to Karole Risker (karole.risker@fumcparagould.org / 870.476.4423) by **Wednesday, April 8th!** It'll be fun!

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Rev. Dane's sermon from Sunday, March 29
2. Holy Week Highlights Flyer
3. Maundy Thursday Love Feast
4. Newsletter Coversheet

This may not be the Holy Week we had in mind, but I am trusting God will meet us in these moments in new ways. Part of me is looking forward to these special services!

In the meantime, please call the church if you need anything at all. Do not put yourself at risk. Ask for help. I am holding you all in prayer and look forward to being with you soon!

Grace & Peace,

Rev. Dane

