

(upbeat music)

- It is an awesome thing to come into the presence of the living God, who is holy love. Therefore, it behooves us to remember that we are creatures and sinners. And to acknowledge the same with penitence and loneliness to the end that we may be forgiven, therefore, I beseech you who are here present to accompany me with sincerity and humility unto the throne of grace in a general confession, saying together, eternal God, thou unseen source of power, we confess our unfaithfulness to Jesus Christ. We who like ancient Jerusalem have often welcomed Him with professions of loyalty, have crucified him before the week ended, amid the waywardness of a violent world, we have denied His faith and have forsaken His way. We have not walked kindly with one another or humbly with thee, or honorably with ourselves. We ask God forgiveness and restoration through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, amen. Hear these words of assurance of the forgiveness of sin. The Lord is nigh unto them, that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. The Lord redeemeth the souls of His servants. None of them that trust in Him shall be desolate. Therefore, trust in the Lord. (soft music) (woman singing faintly) Let us hear the lesson for Palm Sunday, as it is recorded in the gospel according to St. Luke, the 19th chapter Versus 29 to 42. "When Jesus drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount that is called Olives. He sent two of the 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 you are untying it, you shall say this, '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 owner said to them, 'Why are you untying 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 on the road. As he was now drawing near at the descent of the Mount of Olives, 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 Jesus, 'Teacher rebuke your disciples.' He answered, 'I tell you, if they were silent, the very stones would cry out.' And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'Would that even today, you knew the things that make for peace, but now they are hid from your eyes. Amen, and may God bless unto us the reading of His holy word. (soft music) (choir singing faintly) The Lord be with you. Let us pray. Let us offer first a prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus. Oh God, who has proven thy love for mankind by sending us Jesus Christ, our Lord, and has illumined our human life by the radiance of His presence. We give thee thanks for this thy greatest gift. For our Lord's days upon earth, for the record of his deeds of love, for the words he spoke for our guidance and help, for his obedience unto death, for his triumph over death, for the presence of his Spirit with us now, we thank thee, oh God. Grant that the remembrance of the blessed life that ones was lived out on this common earth. Under these ordinary skies, may remain with us in all the tasks and duties of this day, but remember His eagerness not to be ministered unto, but to minister, His sympathy with suffering of every kind, His bravery and face of His own suffering, His meekness of bearing so that when reviled, He reviled not again, His tidiness of purpose in keeping to His appointed task, His simplicity, His self discipline, His serenity of spirit, His complete reliance upon thee, His father in heaven. And in each of these ways, give us grace to follow in His footsteps. And let

us offer two prayers of intercession. One for all kinds of men and the other for the sick. Oh God, who knit us all together in mutual love and responsibility for one another, hear our prayer of intercession for all kinds of folks, in a time of international strife, and national division, of racial tension and class struggle. Of college chaos and academic bewilderment. On behalf of all men, we pray for peace, but not without justice. We pray for quiet, but only if the issues have honestly been faced and resolved. We pray for honor, rather than victory, for understanding rather than mastery, for sanity, rather than success, for the triumph for thy way rather than ours. For thou art the love which is goodwill, The creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all men. All mighty God, to whose son the sick were brought that they might be healed and who did send none away without thy blessing. Look in pity upon all who come to our university hospital And to thee for healing of body, mind and spirit. Send them not away without thy blessing, but now and ever more, grant them thy healing grace for their sake, and our sake and thy sake. And let us offer prayers of supplication for ourselves. Almighty and eternal God, whose son did ride into Jerusalem in triumphant humility. Grant us, so to hail him as Lord of our lives. That we may open the gates of our hearts unto him and allow him to reign in glory there, paying honor unto Him, even the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Almighty and everlasting God, who of thy tender love toward mankind has sent thy son to take upon him, our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility. Mercifully grant that in this holy week, we may both follow the example of his patience and so we made partake of His resurrection through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. And now as our savior, Christ hath taught us, we humbly pray together. 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 the thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever, amen. Beloved in Christ. We are in another high day of Christian recollection. From the beginning, what we call Palm Sunday was a day of rejoicing for the disciples of the Lord. Let it be a day of rejoicing with us. Matthew's gospel records that first moment of exaltation, which we remember today. And the multitude that went before him and that followed, cried, saying, "Hosanna to the son of David, blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord." And Mark's account reads, "And many spread their clothes on the road and others spread leafy branches which they cut from the field. Here are the palms of Palm Sunday. And those who went before, and those who followed cried out, "Hosanna, blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that is coming." What does Hosanna mean? It means Lord be propitious. It means in this setting, God saved the king. And then St. Luke's account. And as he was drawing near at the descent of the Mount of Olives the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice, 'Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.'" Luke's account, you see, is more explicit. While the other gospels plainly convey the messianic import of the event. Luke uses the word king specifically to unpack the meaning of the phrase, son of David. He uses the Greek word, Basileus. It was a word capable of controversy and for some, of extreme offense. And it is this word that prompted the stiff remonstrance of the Pharisees to the prophet of Nazareth, "Rabbi," they urged, "rebuke your disciples." But to this Jesus answered, "I tell you if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." I recall using these words of Jesus to the Pharisees from this pulpit, in the days of the student vigil, it was holy week, 1968. In the annals of this university, that vigil, despite its unfortunate excesses in the early stages became in my view, for some, a moment of rebirth of conscience, stirred awake by the martyrdom of a great American who many believe and still believe was a prophet. The student protest was a resurgence of conscience, I think. Even if we

cannot say the same for all that has followed, but of much of it quite to the contrary. In like manner, perhaps we may understand, however, the high enthusiasm and exultant to claim Of the prophet of Nazareth on that day of long ago. By his followers, he was hailed as the coming deliverer. He was viewed as the long awaited Messiah to come. This hope was embedded in the declarations of Israel's line of prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Zechariah, and the rest. And while the followers of Jesus joined in joyous celebration of expectations shortly to be fulfilled as they thought in the person of their master, bystanders, watching the demonstration sought to identify the central figure who came riding upon a donkey. "Who is this?" They asked. And others answered, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee." For some in those days, Jesus was a teacher. He was rabbi and so addressed even by some Pharisees who regarded him with suspicion. Among many, he was reputed to be a prophet. A very high rank in the thought of Israel. Among a few, those who joined in the acclaim of that entry into Jerusalem, Jesus was viewed in the highest possible terms available to the Jewish mind. He was the coming one. St. Matthew sums it up in the words of the prophet, Zechariah, "Rejoice, greatly old daughter of Zion. Shout, oh Daughter of Jerusalem. behold, thy king cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation. Lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass. The gospel accounts of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem are all of them, brief, but graphic. We do not know how large the disciple's band that joined in the acclaim of that day. Matthew reports that all the city was stirred, and our own experience of the recent past assures us that a resolute demonstration by a small number can be both jarring and spectacular. For the followers of Jesus, it was the moment of truth. It was for them, an epiphany, the unveiling of the Lordship of Jesus. In the very Citadel of Jewish faith and life, their master was at last to be known for who He was. In His hidden identity, He was for them, the coming one. God's chosen deliverer. Therefore, the words of Zechariah seemed right, "Rejoice, greatly or Daughter of Zion, shout, oh daughter of Jerusalem. Behold thy king cometh unto thee. Behold. But now, the paradox of the Christian faith is this, that the proclaimed kingship of Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, was at once the cause of his rejection and crucifixion. And at the same time is the abiding ground of the Christian faith in all ages. Jesus is king. Somehow, Jesus is king. But surely not upon the grounds that aliked prompted the acclaim of his friends and the equally passionate rejection and condemnation of his enemies. The tragedy of Golgotha which followed and which we celebrate in this coming holy week, presupposes the well intended acclamation of Palm Sunday. But when Pontius Pilate nailed to the cross the inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." It was not just a Roman taunt to a subject people. It was Pilate's insistence on publishing the cause for which Jesus was repudiated by the leaders of Israel and the reactionary mob. What was an issue, from the entry into Jerusalem until the torturous death on Good Friday was we must believe a vast misunderstanding and vehement controversy over the alleged kingship of the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. And apparently the puzzle continues and the controversy lingers on. Perhaps the latest testimony from the secular sphere is the recent album, "Jesus Christ Superstar." In the parlance of today, and the idiom of the modern mass media and sports world or entertainment world, the phrase superstar may, somehow, may just say something to many for whom the words Messiah or king have well now lost their meaning. Who can say that this idiom, superstar, is not the latest wistful if bizarre and impoverished probe into the mystery of the kingship of Christ. It is pretty evident. And for a long time now, that the hard rock songs of the time are often vibrant with a search for what is ultimately meaningful to the alienated children of this world. If then these were silent, Would not the very stone cry out. Surely, it was so with exalted band of Jesus' followers on the first Palm Sunday, they too were reaching into the repertoire of prophetic vision for the symbol that was large enough to convey the ultimate significance which they attached to the

ministry and person of their master. They could find no word better than the prophetic challenge, "Behold, thy king cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation." Finally, then what do we understand by this ancient superlative? This proclaimed the kingship of Jesus. You will remember that Jesus Himself did not either confirm or deny what was affirmed in the acclaim of his followers, true. He declined to silence them when prompted by the Pharisees who were scandalized. For a king, His appearance that day was almost a parody upon kingship. Again, Zachariah is to be heard. He is lowly and riding upon an ass. Even upon a colt, the foal of an ass. Was it intended irony? Was it calculated satire upon the prevailing styles of kingship? Or was it a sober and direct parabolic action which had its immediate import for those who had eyes to see. Probably, probably it was all of these, irony, satire and parable. For after all, it is a strange figure of a king who approaches Jerusalem. And as Luke reports, weeps over it, saying, "Would that even today, you knew the things that make for peace but now they are hid from your eyes." Jesus, the King, still weeps over the city of man. But where is the expectancy of triumph? The triumph of anticipated recognition in these words. Plainly it is as if Jesus knew, that the peace, the shalom, between God and men and men and their neighbors which he had enacted in his life and ministry had small hope of recognition in Jerusalem of that day. How could He anticipate that primacy of serving over being served would have espousal among strangers when his own disciples had hardly learned the rudiments of self offering. It was late in the day, indeed on the way to Jerusalem from Galilee when Jesus took his contentious disciples aside to teach them that rank in the kingdom of God is judged not by the measure in which one is served but by the magnitude of his service. Jesus reversed for all time, the order of greatness. Let him who would be great among you become the servant of all. If then we are to speak of the kingship of Jesus, surely it is the exact reversal of the world's estimate of greatness, which still prevails. It is not supremacy of power to which all defer, it is the supremacy of unfaltering dedication to the purpose of God and the wellbeing of man. The "Westminster Confession" represents the authentic Christian understanding of the threefold offices of Christ. In the larger catechism it is said He is furnished with all authority and ability to execute the office of prophet, priest and king. But as the Confession states, these offices are inseparably united. Christ is king because He is also prophet. Christ is king because He is also priest. And the priesthood of Christ is as the epistles to the Hebrews declared this, Christ has no need like other high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people. He did this once for all when he offered up himself. The strange kingship of Jesus then was not and could not be perfected on Palm Sunday. Its epiphany was postponed. His kingship required the week that followed when he would drink the bitter cup of absolute devotion. If the truly great are they that serve most as he taught, then the ultimate and absolute service was the narrow and straight way to the majesty of unequivocal self offering. The paradox of the Christian faith is that the kingship of Christ lies just exactly On the other side of the one perfect and sufficient sacrifice. This Jesus did once for all, when he offered up himself. It is a puzzling kingship, this kingship of Jesus. I find it both terrifying and awesome. Nothing in all of history has been able to detract from it are to refute its solitary majesty. The alienated children of our society may condemn the establishment and among them the church, but they cannot, it seems, quite abandon the supremacy of the one who requires no advocates, but stands in the self evidencing power of his own moral majesty. The rebellious and alienated know that with Him there is authority, even all power and authority in heaven and on earth because with Him was the ability to place the love of God and neighbor above every solicitation of self will. So Christ is king because He exercised this priesthood. In this perspective, the words of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" that resounds annually in this great sanctuary, brings us to our feet. King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And He shall reign

forever and ever. The kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And He shall reign forever and ever. But one final question. How does Jesus Christ reign forever and ever? I answer simply from the standpoint of the Christian faith. Christ reigns, insofar as the self-authenticating power of His moral majesty overrules, our tortured self obsession and sets us free. Christ reigns in man, or He does not reign at all. It is in this sense that His kingdom is not of this world. Christ reigns when we concede for ourselves, the honesty and ability of his authority for our lives and find our destiny fulfilled in a task, which He give us by being what He was, our priest. It is the enlargement, this task of his moral majesty, his kingship over the whole of life. From the Christian perspective then, the message of Palm Sunday is still, behold your king cometh unto you. It is the kingship of moral majesty. And the question is, will you and I own him as Lord. Let us pray. Thine oh Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory, and the majesty for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine. Thine is the kingdom, oh, Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all, so be it, amen. (soft music) (soft music) (soft music) (woman singing faintly) (soft music) Oh God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we offer and present unto thee, our silver and our gold. The symbol of ourselves, to be a reasonable holy and living sacrifice unto thee, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And now unto God's gracious, mercy and protection do we commit you. The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord, lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace, this day and forever more, amen. (church bell tolling) (soft music)