

**The Green Hill Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, March 29, 2026 – Table Copy**

**SILENT PREPARATION:**

Everyone loves a parade! There is evidence that parades in the form of religious processions have been celebrated since 3000 BCE. Such processions were naturally integrated into the celebration of the Christian faith. This is certainly fitting since the church professes to be a pilgrim people, a people on a journey to the sacred place of the kingdom of God.

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Holy God, whose steadfast love offers direction – and purpose – to our lives: Speak to us now through your Word, that we may see all that you wish to reveal to us, give thanks in all circumstances, and grow toward the mind of Christ. In obedient trust, we enter this holy week, eager to participate in a world transformed by your love for us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

**FIRST SCRIPTURE READING**

Matthew 21:1-11

*Our first reading comes from the Gospel of Matthew. It is Matthew's account of Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem....*

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage,  
at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,  
saying to them,  
"Go into the village ahead of you, and -- immediately --  
you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her;  
untie them and bring them to me.

If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.'  
And he will send them immediately."

This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet;  
"Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble and mounted on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them;  
they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them,  
and he sat on them.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,  
and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him – and that followed –  
were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil,  
asking, "Who is this?"  
The crowds were saying,  
"This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

## SECOND SCRIPTURE READING

Philippians 2:4-11

*In our reading from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi,  
he is exhorting the Philippians to be of one mind;  
specifically, the mind of Christ....*

Let each of you look not to your own interests,  
but to the interests of others.  
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who – though he was in the form of God –  
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And – being found in human form – he humbled himself,  
and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him,  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
so that – at the name of Jesus – every knee should bend,  
in heaven – and on earth – and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess – that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

## SERMON

"From King to *Kenosis*...and Back Again!"

Clearly, today is one of the most joyful days of the **Christian year**.

It is a day that involves a king and a colt,  
tumultuous crowds, and thrown-down cloaks.

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It is the day that **Jesus** arrives in **Jerusalem** as a **King**.

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He is riding on a colt,  
and crowds are throwing their cloaks on the ground, before him.

And – they cry out – *“Hosanna to the Son of David!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”* (Matthew 21:9)

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The fact is that the *people are tired* of corrupt **King Herod**;  
*they are most ready* for a **righteous ruler!**

And – so – they want **Jesus** to be their **King**.

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But, not only that – this day had been *clearly predicted* in prophesy:

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The **Scroll of Zechariah** includes these words: (9:9-10)  
*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!*

*Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*He 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.*

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**The people** were *most certainly ready* for such an eventuality!

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And not only **Zechariah** – but the **Psalmist**. also –  
*wrote concerning the coming of the King:* (45:1-4, 6)

*“My heart overflows with a goodly theme;  
I address my verses to the king;  
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.*

*You are the most handsome of men;  
grace is poured upon your lips;  
therefore God has blessed you forever.*

*Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one,  
in your glory and majesty.*

*In your majesty ride on victoriously for the cause of truth  
and to defend the right;  
let your right hand teach you dread deeds....*

*Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.  
Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity;  
you love righteousness and hate wickedness.*

*Therefore God, your God,  
has anointed you with the oil of gladness –  
beyond your companions;  
your robes are all fragrant with myrrh, and aloes, and cassia.*

*From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad....”*

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And – *much closer* to our own day and time –  
a twenty-four-year-old **Englishman** – **Henry Barraclough** –  
*was inspired* to put some of the **Psalmist’s** words to music:

Out of the ivory palaces, Into a world of woe,  
Only His great eternal love Made my Savior go.

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So it is that we know *this part* of the **King’s** story quite well.

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The **crowds** go wild – and *so do we*.

*We* wave our **palm branches**.

We want **Jesus** to be Our **King** –  
and, to *rule our world* with justice, love, and peace.

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The **King** – the **Son of David** – *is coming!*  
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But – *if the truth be told* – the **Palm Sunday story**  
*is not* just about a king and a colt,  
or a crowd and their cloaks.

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It is also about *kenosis* –  
a **Greek word**, that has *no*, direct, **English translation**.

That word comes to us in **Paul's letter** to the **Philippians**,  
and it is *much harder to understand*  
than the words king, colt, crowd, and cloak.

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But – nevertheless – the word *kenosis* is *at the very heart* of the **Christian faith**.

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To *oversimplify a bit*, *kenosis* means “*emptiness*.”

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But, it has a *much deeper* significance:

It communicates the *complete* – and *extraordinary* – *self-emptying*  
that **Christ voluntarily offered** on the **Cross**.

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And, the word – *kenosis* – raises a number of **important questions** – *for us* –  
as we enter **Holy Week**.

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**What** – exactly – *was accomplished by kenosis?*

**How** – then – did this self-emptying *result in fullness?*

**And, how** – today – *can we empty ourselves* – so that **God** will fill us?

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**To begin**, *what was accomplished by kenosis?*

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**Paul** tells us that **Jesus** was in the **form of God**,  
but *did not regard equality with God*  
as *something to be exploited*.

(vv. 5-6)

Or – in the words of **Eugene Peterson's** paraphrase, *The Message* –  
**Jesus** “*didn't think so much of himself*  
*that he had to cling to the advantages of that [Divine] status*  
*no matter what.*”

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Instead, Jesus *“emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death –  
even death on a cross.”*

(vv. 7-8)

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This – then – is where we run into *kenosis* in the original Greek,  
where its meaning is *“emptied out.”*

Christ Jesus *“emptied himself”* –  
taking the form of a slave –  
so that he looked – for all the world –  
like an ordinary, very common, nondescript –  
perhaps even marginalized –  
human being!

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So *what* – then – *is accomplished* by this?

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The Scripture tells us that God  
*“highly exalted him,  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
so that – at the name of Jesus – every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.”*

(vv. 9-11)

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And – so – Palm Sunday would be *easy to understand* –  
if it *contained only* the familiar kings, colts, crowds, and cloaks.

Indeed – in the *simple version* of the story –  
**King Jesus** would ride into town and confront **King Herod**.

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And, the *one with the biggest crowd* would win.  
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But *kenosis* turns our expectations *upside down*.

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Precisely because **Jesus** emptied, humbled, lowered, and abased himself,  
**God** exalted him,  
and *made him the king* of all creation.

And – so – the **accomplishment of *kenosis*** is fullness, glory, and power.

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Next, *how* – exactly – does this self-emptying *result in fullness*?

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For **Jesus**, *kenosis* leads to glory and power  
*because it is based on humility and obedience*.

Or – remembering Peterson’s words –  
**Jesus** “*didn’t think so much of himself*  
*that he had to cling to the advantages of [divine] status*  
*no matter what.*”

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And so –  
*instead of remaining in the safety and security of his divine existence* –  
**Jesus** *entered human life* as a fetus, a baby, a child,  
and – eventually – a grown man.

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Or – as C.S. Lewis suggests – (Mere Christianity)  
“*If you want to get the hang of it,*  
*think of how you would like to become a slug, or a crab.*”

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**Jesus** was in the **form of God**,  
*but chose to accept the form of a slave*.

And *that is the utmost in humility!*

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**Humility** – from a human standpoint – is a *counterintuitive attitude*.

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Keith Krell writes:

*"In Lewis Carroll's famous book, Through the Looking Glass,  
Alice steps through the mirror in the living room,  
[only] to find a world on the opposite side  
where everything is backwards:*

*Alice wants to go forward,  
but every time she moves,  
she ends up back where she started.*

*She tries to go left and ends up right.  
Up is down and fast is slow."*

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*"Similarly"* – Krell goes on to say –

*"Christianity is a kind of looking glass world  
where everything works on principles opposite  
to those of the world around us.*

- + To be blessed, be a blessing to others.
- + To receive love, give love.
- + To be honored, first be humble.
- + To truly live, die to yourself.
- + To gain the unseen, let go of the seen.
- + To receive, first give.
- + To save your life, lose it.
- + To lead, be a servant.
- + To be first, be last....

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*"In **Philippians 2:5-11**, Paul [explains] that *the way up is down*....  
The way to be great is to go lower....*

*"The logical flow of **Philippians** has been [leading] up to this great truth."*

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**Jesus** – then – said "Yes:"

*"Yes" to emptying himself – and to entering human life.*

*And, he did all of this out of **obedience to God**.*

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As Jesus prayed – repeatedly – in the Garden of Gethsemane:  
“Not my will, but thine, be done!”

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As Paul tells us – Jesus “humbled himself,  
and became obedient to the point of death –  
even death on a cross.”

(v. 8)

And – because of *this choice* –  
God exalted him, and gave him the name that is above every name –  
making him Lord of heaven and earth.

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For Jesus – then – *kenosis* led to kingship!

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Finally, how can we empty ourselves so that God can fill us?

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To be sure, most of us *are not* going to be asked to follow Jesus –  
*to the point of death* on a cross.

But – nevertheless – *we are* certainly challenged  
to show **humility** – and **obedience** –  
as we *walk the path* of Christ in the world.

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We might try to *develop a welcoming attitude* toward others.

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Martin Hengel was a great New Testament historian,  
who taught at the University of Tübingen – in Germany.

And – in Germany – professors are *highly esteemed* – and *put on a pedestal*.

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But Pastor John Dickson remembers  
how Professor Hengel would have his students *come to his home* –  
on Friday evenings – for meals, and discussions:

“He wasn’t influential just because he was a brilliant scholar” –  
says Dickson:

“It was the fact that he let people come very close,  
that he shared his life with them –  
that humility is what made his influence lasting.”

Happily, *we can show the same kind* of humility –  
whether we are influencing learners,  
interacting with our neighbors,  
greeting strangers,  
or working with a church – or other – group.

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**People** are grateful when we *take them seriously*  
and *welcome them* into our lives.

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We *might also* try to be the **servant of others**.

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Our practice of *kenosis* also *includes obedience* to **Jesus Christ**.

And – as **Jesus** taught his followers –  
***“Whoever wishes to be great among you  
must be your servant.”***

(Matthew 20:26)

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**Jesus** wants us to *empty ourselves* – as he did –  
and to *act as servants* to each other –  
just as he ***“came not to be served but to serve,  
and to give his life a ransom for many.”***

(v. 28)

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And, here are some other suggestions:

We might try to be generous with material things....

We might try thinking the best of others –  
forgiving them when they don't know what they're doing....

We might try praying for our “enemies” –  
and those who “persecute” us – see Matthew chapter 5....

We might try being peacemakers....

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The **good news** is that this emptying  
*does not* lead to embarrassment and powerlessness.

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Rather, it leads to **great fullness**:

Jesus says that ***“all who exalt themselves will be humbled,  
and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”***

(Matthew 23:12)

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Sometime back, there was an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

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It was about a **14-year old Jewish girl** – at the end of **World War II** –  
who was discovered – lost, alone, and barely alive –  
lying on the platform of an abandoned railroad station.

It was the day the **Russian army** had liberated the **Nazi-controlled labor camp** –  
where *she had been held captive*.

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But – although she was now free – she was *half-starved*,  
and *too exhausted* to even pick herself up off the ground.

Indeed, *she thought she would die* there.

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But – then – a **young priest** came beside her.  
And, he offered her tea, two slices of bread, and some cheese.

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“Where do you want to go?” he asked her.  
“**Krakow**,” she managed to reply.

“I’m going there too,” he said. “Let me help you up.”

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He tried to lift her to her feet – but she collapsed.

So he picked her up, and literally carried her – for two miles –  
to the train station in **Krakow**.

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“What is your name?” he asked. “**Edith Zierer,**” she replied.

“My name is **Karol,**” he replied.

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Later – after they arrived at **Krakow** – they were separated,  
and they never saw each other again.

That is, *until* the year **2000.**

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Then – in **Jerusalem,** at the **Holocaust memorial** –  
**Edith Zierer** – with tears in her eyes –  
clasped the hands of a **Polish priest** named **Karol.**

The world grew to know him as **Pope John Paul II.**

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The **Pope-to-be** had performed that *quiet act of service* –  
*lifting up* and *carrying* a poor **Holocaust survivor** –  
and he *had forgotten* it.

But **Edith Zierer** *had not* forgotten.

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And – *before the whole world* – she declared,  
“**He came like an angel out – of nowhere – and gave me life.**”

“**He saved me. There’s no other word for it.**  
**It’s thanks to him I’m here today.”**

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And – then – **Edith Zierer** quoted a verse from the **Talmud,**  
which says,

“**To save one life is to save the world.”**

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Friends, **Palm Sunday** has always been a *predictable story* –  
one of kings, colts, crowds, and cloaks.

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But, the *addition – of the one, untranslatable, word, kenosis* –  
turns **our understanding upside down.**

This **self-emptying of Jesus** –  
*grounded in humility, and obedience* –  
is the *unexpected key* to his ultimate, **heavenly, fullness.**

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**And, *that self-emptying* is the key to our fullness, as well!**

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**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: *Amen.***

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**\* AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)**

**In Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful men and women. But his complete obedience led him into conflict with his people. His life and teaching judged their goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself freely for them, he took upon himself the judgment under which all stand convicted. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as the Messiah and Lord. The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for all. Thanks be to God! Amen.**

**PRAYER OF DEDICATION (*Unison*)**

**Most Gracious and Loving God, may these offerings bring life-changing good news, both to those who give, and to all who are reached by the caring ministries of this church. May they help to restore relationships of trust among us, and become outpourings of generosity that echo your steadfast love around the world. Through the joy of giving, may we be raised to new life, and become partners in bringing your new order among us. Amen.**

**CHARGE AND BENEDICTION**

Because Jesus Christ emptied himself –  
because he was willing to leave heaven, and die for us –  
we are here, today.

And if we are willing to empty ourselves – for others –  
they may also come to share in joy – joy that is truly unspeakable –  
and full of glory!

Let us receive the Lord's benediction....

