

22.04.10. Palm Sunday

Welcome to Palm Sunday worship whenever or wherever you are joining this service. If you have a Palm Cross, please would you keep it handy for later.

Let me set the scene.

Jerusalem was filling ready for Passover and in a state of high excitement and religious fervour. With crowds in holiday mood, it is not surprising that when the popular healer and teacher, Jesus, entered the city surrounded by his followers, the crowd took notice and among the oft repeated prophecies and the psalms sung on the way to the Temple the words from Zechariah were remembered and links made.

Zechariah 9:9-10b

Rejoice, rejoice people of Zion!
Shout for joy you people of Jerusalem!
Look your King is come to you!
He comes victorious, but humble and riding on a colt the foal of a donkey,
Your King will make peace among the nations;
He will rule from sea to sea, from the Euphrates to the end of the earth.

However, as people watched and rejoiced, many brought to the event their own concerns and fears. I'm reminded of the musical Jesus Christ superstar. On You tube there is a clip of the Hosanna song. It really captures the joy and adulation of the crowds and the love many had for Jesus. They sing, Will you smile at me? Will you bless and heal?

However, within it there are darker notes. We see Judas unhappy with the situation wrestling with his own decisions.

We see Jewish leaders worried about the crowds bringing down the wrath of Rome. The religious establishment said – Keep the crowd quiet they may cause a riot and disturb the status quo.

And those rebelling against Roman rule -Will you fight for me – look at the crowds following you?

And finally, the portent of things to come.... Will you die for me?

Through Lent we have followed Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. He has arrived but that is not the end of the journey. There are difficult days ahead and we are invited to follow through this coming week and not to just jump from the joy of the palm waving procession to the triumph of the empty tomb without hearing the messages and witnessing the pain that goes between.

Let us pray

Lord of Palm Sunday,
who walked the path of pain
and died the death of costly sacrifice,
you love beyond measure.

Lord of Palm Sunday:

come among your people.

Lord of Palm Sunday
who humbled yourself before people
and suffered the agony no one can imagine,
you offer us hope, beyond measure.

Lord of Palm Sunday:

come among your people.

Lord of Palm Sunday,
God became man for us,
who was mocked and scorned and hated,
you come to us, always, beyond measure.

Lord of Palm Sunday:

come among your people.

Lord of Palm Sunday,
come to us and all God's people,
Love beyond measure.

Lord of Palm Sunday:

come among your people. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. **Amen**

Luke 19:28-40 New Living Translation

²⁸ Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. ²⁹ As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. ³⁰ "Go into that village over there," he told them. "As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying that colt?' just say, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³² So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. ³³ And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, "Why are you untying that colt?" ³⁴ And the disciples simply replied, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on. ³⁶ As he rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. ³⁷ When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. ³⁸ "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!"

³⁹ But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!"

⁴⁰ He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!"

StF 263 Hosanna, Hosanna

Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Lord, we lift up your name,
with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord, my God!
Hosanna in the highest!

2 Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Lord, we lift up your name,
with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord, my God!
Glory to the King of kings!

Carl Tuttle (b. 1953)

It's a story of contrasts, of conflicting emotions and the challenge to make choices. Today we cannot fail to reflect on recent events in Ukraine or mention the equally terrible images seen from other wars including Syria and Afghanistan. War always brings in its wake atrocities and the longer it lasts the more evil they become. But note the contrasts. The might of the Russian army entered the country and did its worst. We witnessed the suffering of ordinary people of all ages, forced to abandon all and flee, breaking up families, leaving treasured belongings behind and heading for an unknown future. In sharp contrast we saw the generosity of overwhelmed surrounding states who set out to do all they could to help. It gladdened our hearts to see such love in the face of so much pain, fear and hate. And yet, even in this situation, evil is

creeping in as human traffickers try to exploit the desperate. We see the contrasts between good and evil played out before our eyes and we each make our choices as to what to think and how to respond, knowing that this is not a problem easily resolved.

At the same time as Jesus came down the road from the Mount of Olives and received the adulation of the crowds, Pontius Pilate was entering another part of Jerusalem. With him horses, soldiers, banners, all the signs of Roman authority, all the power to repress and subdue a conquered people. A procession designed to evoke fear but also fueling resentment and hate. What a contrast to the joy and love shown to Jesus in that other small procession in another part of the city with simple palms for flags, with cloaks on the ground and with Jewish songs.

The first procession was a sign of the authority of Rome's Caesar. The other an acknowledgement of God's power and the triumph of love.

Of course, it wasn't quite so simple which is why I referred to the clip from Jesus Christ Superstar. There was no doubt a spontaneous outpouring of love for Jesus, praise and gratitude for miracles witnessed and teaching made plain but, even then, other interests were at play among those who wanted to use Jesus' message for their own ends.

The questions must be asked. Was it right to risk the status quo where a subdued nation lived uneasily under the yoke of Rome who, in turn, tolerated their religious practices? Was it right to antagonize these rulers and risk a blood bath? On the other hand, could it not be a good idea to take the heightened emotions of this crowd following a popular leader and use the event to fight against Rome? Was this an

answer to the question of how much longer must God's chosen people bow to other rulers?

When the crowd dispersed, and all went quiet the disciples were left with Jesus to live through the events which were to follow.

To his disciples, who'd witnessed so much, got it wrong so often but learned and achieved more than they could have dreamed 3 years before, there was a new understanding that Jesus was showing another way. The way which resonated in the hearts of those who followed and cheered that day. Who, in the excitement of the moment, made that decision to follow but who might soon be saying other words?

As his disciples had feared, coming to Jerusalem at that time and arriving in that way, provoked a reaction. Political expediency required that this man be done away with for the greater good of all..... And the rest we know.

So, what do we see in this procession which we celebrate each year? Do we recognize not only the meekness of Jesus riding on a donkey, or do we look beyond to a greater majesty? A majesty unlike that of Rome, or any other conquering state, but a majesty which speaks of greater things, of eternal glories and of a plan that goes beyond the immediate.

What do we see in that procession?

What is our verdict? We who know so much more of the events which at the time were still to come. Our next reading answers the question for us.

It tells us to be Christ like, to model ourselves on Jesus. To this end it summarises who Jesus, the man, was and who Christ, the son of God, is. For two millennia humankind has struggled to understand what modern jargon puts simply as 'the Jesus event' and about which

theologians have spoken and written countless words. Paul knew that the Philippians, to whom the words of our next reading are addressed, were a struggling and persecuted Christian community needing affirmation of what they believed in, instruction as to how they should live and to be given hope for the future. This is our need too and the passage supplies it. It speaks for itself.

We will follow Jesus' earthly journey this week, we will descend to the valley bottom with his disciples, but we can view it from a different perspective; we know what follows. And so, for us, we have a reminder in Paul's words of Jesus placed not just in that tragic week over 2000 years ago but as part of eternity, a reminder of Christ's relationship with God and his role in history.

Philippians 2:5-11 New Living Translation

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶ Though he was God,

he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;

he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of
highest honour

and gave him the name above all other
names,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should
bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is
Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

If you are following this service at home you may not have been able to receive a palm cross but you may have one left over from another year. If you have, look at it now. Reflect on how it is formed. A palm leaf dried, twisted, shaped to make a cross, given to be a reminder. What do you do with yours?

We have looked at our modern world and grieved. We have looked at Jesus and tried to understand the mysteries he taught, and the evil done to him. We have been uplifted by Paul's words and responded deep in our hearts. And so now, mindful of our own shortcomings, we make our choice to follow.

Let us pray

Lord of Palm Sunday we look at our crosses. We remember that in Ash Wednesday worship next year some of us will burn these and, putting the ash on our foreheads in the shape of a cross, we will repent of our sins and seek once more to remember and to follow you on your journey towards Jerusalem.

Today, again, we ask for your forgiveness.

Forgive us that,

rather than listen to what you teach,
we so often heedlessly follow the crowd
regardless of where that crowd leads.

Forgive us when our words and actions do
harm.

Forgive us when we do not act or speak for
good.

Our intentions are to follow you,
to live in your kingdom of justice
but so often the other way is easier.

Through this Holy Week before us
grant us understanding and resolve to do your
will.

We thank you that,

as we confess and repent,

we can be assured of sins forgiven.

Thanks be to God. Amen

StF 504 May the mind

- 1 May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.

- 2 May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

- 3 May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

- 4 May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting --
this is victory.

- 5 May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928)

Let us pray

Lord of Palm Sunday we bring to you our longings, our fears and our concerns knowing that you hear, that you already know the thoughts and concerns within each of us and that you will answer.

We thank you that, wherever there is need, you are there working through your disciples. We thank you and ask you to bless the work of peacekeepers, of aid agencies and all the many unsung heroes working day by day to help others.

Use the thoughts of our hearts, we pray, to lead us to action when that is right, to restrain us

when that is the better course and to support and comfort us in our need.

And so, in the quietness now we bring to you - The countries of Eastern Europe and especially the peoples of Ukraine and Russia. We pray for a peaceful end to the conflict, an end to the fears and insecurities which lead to war and a rebuilding of shattered lives and communities. Give wisdom and courage to those who lead. Let all share an understanding of each other's needs and a tolerance of differences.

Lord of Palm Sunday

Hear our prayer

We pray for all those suffering financial hardship.

Give them those to whom they can turn for help.

Bless those workers in charities and government who seek to meet need.

Lord of Palm Sunday

Hear our prayer

We pray for those we know for whom we carry a burden of concern.

In quietness we name them.

.....

We know you, too, care and know their pain.

We ask you for their healing and for wisdom for ourselves to minister in your name.

Lord of Palm Sunday

Hear our prayer

We pray for ourselves.

Each of us carrying our own burdens of fear of past pains and physical infirmities.

We pray for ourselves when doubts and questions threaten to overwhelm.

Give us the comfort of your assurance and a vision of your kingdom here on earth.

Amen

StF 362 Meekness and Majesty

Meekness and majesty,
manhood and deity,
in perfect harmony --
the man who is God.
Lord of eternity,
dwells in humanity,
kneels in humility
and washes our feet.

Oh, what a mystery --
meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship,
for this is your God,
this is your God!

Father's pure radiance,
perfect in innocence,
yet learns obedience
to death on a cross:
suffering to give us life,
conquering through sacrifice --
and as they crucify,
prays, 'Father forgive.'

Wisdom unsearchable,
God the invisible,
love indestructible
in frailty appears:
Lord of infinity,
stooping so tenderly,
lifts our humanity
to the heights of his throne.
Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Benediction

Lord of the journey,
as you set your face towards Jerusalem,
we now set our faces towards the world for
which you died.
May we be your people wherever you send us.
May we know your presence on the way.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the
love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
remain with us now and always.
Amen.