



## Service for Personal or Private use 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 – Palm Sunday

Thank you for all the encouraging reports from people who have used services already, and for some helpful comments. **This week's helpful comment** is that you may be able to find the hymns on U-tube, with the words displayed. Others may be able to use 'Alexa' – if you don't know what that means, don't worry! May God bless us all as we join in fellowship even when separated physically.

*If you have a palm cross from previous years, why not get it out as a focus while you use this service. Perhaps afterwards you would like to put it in your window as an act of witness.*

*You might have a branch of greenery that could be hung at your door, like a Christmas wreath.*

*You may be artistic enough to create a cross from paper or card.*

**Pause** briefly, to leave behind the duties or cares you have been carrying;  
to recall a few of the good things and the blessings that have come to you this past week;  
to remember that God is as certainly with us at home as he is when we are in church;  
to remind yourself that the love of Jesus is not diminished.

**Hymn** You may want to use a reflective hymn, such as 'My song is love unknown' (Hymns & Psalms 173 / Singing the Faith 277) or a more affirmative hymn such as 'Make Way' (StF 264) – or some other favourite.

### **Prayer**

O Lord our God, a gracious and loving Heavenly Father, with so many of your people we join together to adore your greatness, your goodness and your faithfulness.

The God by whose word of command all things came into being allows us to address him as "Our Father." The God who sets the stars in the heavens, who counts them and names them, also notices and cares about us. The God of the distant hills is also the God close beside us now, as we are praying. The God of the rhythm of the seasons, of the alternating pattern of day and night, is the God who remains faithful to us in every circumstance of our lives.

We worship. We adore.

Through this week you have been with us; in quiet times of reflection, when it has been easy to lift our hearts to holy things; in busy times, when all our attention has had to be on those demands; when we have been in company, or when we have longed to have company; when we have been

grateful for good things, and when we wondered where the good things might come from. You have not left us, nor will you.

As we get closer to Easter, an Easter unlike any we have known before, may we enjoy a richer sense of all it means that Jesus took this journey *for us*, and *with us*, sharing the sinner's shame and dying the sinner's death, so that he might share his risen life with us.

When the praises of Sunday have faded on Monday, *Lord have mercy.*

When it has been easy to wave a palm cross, but I have been unwilling to take up my cross to follow you, *Lord have mercy.*

When I have found it as easy to shout "Crucify" with one crowd as it was to sing "Hosanna" with another, *Lord have mercy.*

When it has been easy to lay down a cloak, but I have been reluctant to lay down anything else for you, *Lord have mercy.*

Lord, who bore our sins in your body on the tree, and has promised pardon and peace to all who confess their sins, raise us to newness of life, and fill us with the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

### **Read** Psalm 118 verses 1, 2 and 19 to 29

This psalm is regularly used on Palm Sunday, and will have many familiar thoughts in it. One special reason for using it is that verse 25 in the Hebrew uses the word 'Hosanna,' that we associate so much with the cries of the crowd. In the Bible I normally use, the verse begins "Save us, we pray, O Lord!" and "Save us" is the "Hosanna". It is a prayer, as well as an exclamation of worship.

Allow yourself time to think about some of the other familiar phrases in the psalm.

- The Psalm begins and ends with the same note of thankfulness. How much space and time in my prayers is there for thanking God?
- God's "steadfast love" is more than just reliable; it is what he has committed himself to showing to his people. It is the word in Psalm 23 "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me..." and reflects his loyalty towards us.
- Jesus quoted verse 22 to his enemies (Matthew 2 v42). He remains our sure foundation.
- The gift of this day (verse 24) is one we often sing (H&P 578 StF 152)
- In verse 27 "the Lord is God, and has made his light to shine upon us," reminding us of the old blessing, "The Lord bless you and keep you... and make his face to shine upon you" which is first found in Numbers 6:24-26

Perhaps you would like to use the hymn 'This is the day...' and let it remind you that the Day when he rose again is also coming, and that The Spirit has come to all who believe.

*I have no head for heights, but as an act of family solidarity on a trip to London I booked to go on the London Eye. As the Wheel turned so slowly I had little enjoyment, apart from some distant views which didn't involve looking down. Once I was there in the pod, I was committed to the entire journey.*

*In January of 49 BC Julius Caesar 'crossed the Rubicon.' It was a river, and for a military leader to cross it was effectively an act of treason. He had passed the point of no return.*

*Palm Sunday was that 'Point of No Return' for Jesus. Let's read about it:*

**Read** Matthew 21 verses 1 to 11.

*As you read it, why not try to imagine how it would be covered on television news if it happened today. What scenes would be shown? Who would be interviewed? What questions would they be asked? And what answers would they give?*

*And if they interviewed you about it, what answers would you want to give?*

Let's imagine what some of the main characters would have said about what they thought was happening. We will, deliberately, leave Jesus till last. He is the most important, and only he truly understood the whole significance of the day.

A member of the crowd might tell of the general excitement of pilgrims. They come long distances up to Jerusalem for Passover, excited about being with so many worshippers in a holy place, and keeping fresh the memory of God's saving acts so long ago. When this boisterous bunch approach down the hill from the Mount of Olives, why not join in?

It's only later that they discover that the man at the centre is Jesus from Nazareth, the one that some thought was a prophet. They know about him by reputation, his teaching and his miracles, but it's the first time many of them have seen him. Is this the time when his message that the Kingdom of God is near will actually come true?

A detail easily overlooked is the symbolism of the palm branches. The Jews who were so cautious about "graven images" did not use a ruler's head on their coins. The symbol they used to mark their national identity was – a palm tree. It wasn't just a convenient thing to throw on the road; it was also a defiant political claim that they were making.

The owner of the donkey might tell of the arrangement made beforehand by Jesus to borrow the donkey. Quite likely he had little idea of the reason. But evidently he thought he could trust Jesus, and that his animal would come to no harm.

A disciple probably has more idea than most. They have travelled with Jesus from Galilee, knowing that Jerusalem was the destination. Although they have

heard him talk about being betrayed into Gentile hands and crucified, that has been conveniently blocked out. Instead, they are carried away with the general euphoria. They will sing the words from Psalm 118, of Hosanna! God save us now! They believe with all their heart that Jesus is the one who “Comes in the name of the Lord,” and that he is a sign of God’s presence among them. This, surely in their minds, is the time when the Kingdom of God will start, and they are going to be at the heart of the action. In years to come they will tell their grandchildren how they saw it all start! They can hardly keep secret their hopes that in this new Kingdom, these close associates of Jesus will be the ones who get the privileged places.

There’s probably a ‘jobsworth’ from the Council who will just moan about the vandalism of stripping the palm trees, and asking “Who’s going to clear up all this mess when they have all gone home?” There’s always one!

And I expect there was a priest or a Pharisee ready to pour cold water on what they regarded as dangerous rabble-rousing. Don’t the crowd realize how provocative all this will be to the Roman powers? And surely Jesus knows that the proper way to worship God is in the quiet, and the solemn dignity of the Temple, led by properly authorised priests?

Press the question a bit further with them, and they will tell you that Jesus has scored a lot of black marks in his time. He keeps undesirable company, mixing with “tax collectors and sinners.” He has a very poor record about observing the Sabbath, breaking most of their traditions. He has been known to touch lepers and even to touch dead bodies, making him “unclean” by their standards. And he has frequently questioned the traditional understanding of the laws handed down from earliest times.

This must be the moment to ask Jesus himself. What did he mean by entering Jerusalem like this? Was he just going along with the crowd, or had he planned this all along?

The ‘password’ to answer anyone who questioned why the disciples were taking the donkey suggests that Jesus had planned this, and had made the arrangement in advance. When the writers of the gospels tell us that all this took place to fulfil the prophecy from Zechariah (it’s chapter 9, verse 9, if you need to check), they clearly thought this was part of the divine plan. Kings who took a city in battle generally rode in on their war-horse; to ride on a donkey instead was a sign of peaceful intention.

Jesus was not starting a military take-over. They carried no weapons.

The Kingdom that was beginning was the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God. It would change the hearts of men and women, so that in their lives and their actions the prayer would be answered, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The will of God would be central. The love of God would rule in human hearts. On earth would be seen the first-fruits of the

time when all the world would gladly follow God. It was no coincidence that Jesus was the focal point today, as he will be then.

But Jesus was not carried away, as his disciples and the crowd seem to have been. He doesn't use the momentum to seize power. This was another example of the temptation he had resisted in the wilderness, to bow down to Satan and claim the kingly authority of this world. Could he have done it? We cannot tell, but must be glad that he refused. It is because he chose that harder path, the way of the Cross and Resurrection, that human hearts can be changed. Unless human hearts are changed the Kingdom of God will never be found.

In 1917 General Allenby led the British Army into Jerusalem, freeing it from the Turkish Army. As a Christian man, he dismounted from his horse, saying that it was not fitting for a follower of Jesus to ride into the city on a horse, where Jesus had gone on a donkey.

### **The Collect for Palm Sunday**

Eternal God, in your tender love towards the human race  
you sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
to take our flesh and to suffer death upon a cross.

Grant that we may follow the example of his great humility,  
and share in the glory of his resurrection;  
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

You may like to use the hymn 'Jesus comes with all his grace' (StF 326 and H&P 168) or some other

### **Prayer**

Lord, there have been too many times in my life when – like characters around you on Palm Sunday – I was very confident, but events showed that I was wrong. Guard me from being so sure of myself that there is no longer space for you to correct me.

I am as ready as most people to be swept along by the emotions of the crowd, to join in the shouting and singing and actions. May mine be a commitment that stands the test of time and the challenges of difficulty.

Like your disciples, I can be optimistic about how you will achieve your goal. In my mind I see how your plans and mine will bear fruit, for the world or in my life. In the shadow of your cross, help me to trust your way before mine.

I love the company of your people, Lord; I have looked forward to the fellowship of prayer and worship, and seeing my friends at church. While I am not able to be with them, I ask your blessing on them. For those who are lonely, be their companion. For those who are ill, bring them your

healing. For those who are grieving, be their comfort. For those unable to visit family members, channel their love. May we all know that “Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

*You may want to pause here, and mention names or bring faces to mind. It is part of the way we commend these people to God.*

I pray for those who are in the front line of the battle with the Corona Virus; for the doctors and nurses and ambulance staff and pharmacists, who are in the headlines; for the military engaged in distributing supplies and creating hospitals; for Care Workers and staff in Residential and Care Homes; for those engaged in research and development of tests and of other essential equipment.

And in the great concerns about Corona, I pray for those suffering from other illnesses; for the homeless and the unemployed; for the starving; for the refugees; for those in war-zones; for other charities, starved of personnel and income; for all whose needs no longer attract the media.

*There may be other concerns that you want to turn into prayer. It is easier to do that when we are sharing like this than it sometimes is during a church service...*

### **The Lord's Prayer**

*Please use whichever version you are most comfortable using.*

At some point on Palm Sunday we usually sing ‘All glory, laud and honour’ (StF 262, H&P160), but you may want to use another favourite.

**The Grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore.

Amen.

### **Next Sunday is Easter Day.**

Look out for worship resources provided by the Circuit for Good Friday, as well as for Easter Day. Look out for worship resources prepared nationally, to give the awareness of worshipping with an even larger group of Christians.

### **Bible readings for Easter Day**

Acts chapter 10 verses 34 to 43 *or* Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 1 to 6

Psalm 118 verses 1, 2 and 14 to 24

Colossians chapter 3 verses 1 to 4 *or* the reading from Acts chapter 10

John chapter 20 verses 1 to 18 *or* Matthew chapter 28 verses 1 to 10