

## Service for Palm Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup>

### Confession

Loving God, you show us in your word today that your Kingdom is not like the ones we seem to prefer, that your rule is not one of dominance and power but service.

When we have thought of ourselves above all else, forgive us

When we have failed to listen to your word as we should have done, forgive us

When we have lacked the courage to serve knowing we have no reason to fear, forgive us.

When we have turned away from your sacrifice and suffering, forgive us.

When we have been too easily distracted and seem far away from you, forgive us.

Loving God, in our deepest being, may we know that You are the one who saves. May we trust in your goodness and mercy, experiencing your forgiveness and extending that forgiveness to others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

(Adapted from the Methodist Prayer Handbook 2019/20)

### Thanksgiving and praise

Dear God,

Thank you for all that is good (*pause to bring to mind the good in your life*),

..for our creation and our humanity,

..for the stewardship you have given us of this planet earth

..for the gifts of life and of one another

..for your love which is unbounded and eternal. Amen

(Prayer from Rev, Jim Cotter)



### Adapted from Psalm 118

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Let the whole world say, "His love endures forever."

When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD; he brought me into a spacious place.

The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?

The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in human power.

The LORD is my strength and my defence; he has become my salvation.

Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous:

"The LORD's right hand has done mighty things."

Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.  
This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.  
I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;  
the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us.  
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.  
Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

**Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11**

*This is a joyous reading before the creeping dread of Holy Week. As I was thinking about it, I suddenly thought of people standing on their doorsteps on Thursday evening cheering and clapping for workers in the NHS.*

- Who/what would you like to celebrate at this moment?
- If Jesus were passing, what would YOU shout?



**Some reflections**

Today's short powerful Gospel is Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. But it is our entry too. Our entry into Holy Week – into the drama that changed history. Just to set the scene a bit. It is approaching Passover when the Jewish people recall that God heard their suffering and released them from slavery. It is the event that defines their faith which is why they remember it annually so vividly and powerfully in the Passover meal. At this time, it would have been a painful memory, because they had found themselves in slavery to a new Pharaoh – the Roman empire. It would have been a time of heightened emotion, of religious and nationalistic fervour. It is estimated that at least 100,000 pilgrims would have descended on the city! Imagine London on VE day.

Rome would have known the dangers and reinforced the city. Their garrisons would have been doubly vigilant. The religious authorities would also have been on their guard. They would have known that any show of anti-Rome dissent or uprising would have dire consequences for everyone. During Passover in 4 BC, when Archelaus had become nervous about the restless crowds, he had ordered an attack with the resulting deaths of 3000 people.

So it was tense and dangerous. It was joyful and exuberant.

We probably relate to the first of these descriptions rather than the second. It is doubtful that people will feel like waving palms this Sunday. Like the people of Palestine at that time, we have our own occupying force in the form of a virus. It is limiting our freedoms and obscuring our future. It is challenging our securities and accepted norms.

Jesus entered his turbulent city on a donkey's colt. Crowds in Jerusalem and other cities would have seen Roman generals entering their gates with triumphal processions, lording it over the people. It would have been hard for them not to draw a contrast with that. Jesus' entry is almost a satire of the occupiers. It is a peaceful mockery of the notion of Caesar as Lord. And it is a supplanting of the Lordship of Caesar and of the dominion of every secular power since.

But it is also perfectly in keeping with his humble birth, his peasant lifestyle (dependent on others) and his later washing of his disciples' feet. It is his model of leadership and witness. He spent his whole ministry teaching this humility and 'meekness' because he saw the dangers of power and domination. It is in the seeking of these things that we lose ourselves.

The people knew where the real power lay and they shouted in response: '*Hosanna!*' – '*honour and respect to the one who saves us.*' They would have been shouting that whether Jesus was there or not – it was their pilgrim chorus as they entered Jerusalem because they already knew that God was their Saviour.

Having put so much faith in other things, we need to rediscover 'Hosanna' faith. It could be that this temporary loss of freedom, this powerlessness, will force us to reconsider where our faith really lies. In his address on Friday Pope Francis prayed this:

*Lord, in this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: "Wake up, Lord!"*

The Gospel says that the '*whole city was stirred*' or '*trembled*'. Almost like an earthquake. We get this! Our whole world has been stirred – not by the entry of Jesus but by a virus.

As we enter Holy Week, we need to be 'stirred' again, but this time by the truth. It is God who saves us – not economic systems or politicians or wealth or things. They will pass away. It is a different kind of Kingdom – one represented by a humble man on a young donkey – that will really last.

**Prayers of intercession** (*pause after each line to bring to mind those you know*)

Loving God, we pray for the people of our community:

For all the staff, supporters and members of The Cornerstone Community

For all our families and loved ones

For all those in the key services and especially those risking their lives in the NHS

For those suffering with the virus and those who have lost loved ones because of the virus

For those made particularly vulnerable at this time and especially those in isolation on their own

Loving God, send your healing and consoling Spirit upon us all. Amen.

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

To conclude our worship, I have included the '12 Steps' prayer. The first 3 steps of the programme are:

- We admitted that we were powerless (over our addiction)
- We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity
- We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.

They seem utterly relevant to the situation we find ourselves in!

**Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can  
And the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.**