

Written Service 2nd April 2023
Palm Sunday
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Deacon Helen Snowball

Charity number 1134226

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home. If you are well enough, why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Psalm 118 v 1-2, 19-29

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.

2 Let all Israel repeat: "His faithful love endures forever."

Open for me the gates where the righteous enter, and I will go in and thank the Lord.

20 These gates lead to the presence of the Lord, and the godly enter there.

21 I thank you for answering my prayer and giving me victory!

22 The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.

23 This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see.

24 This is the day the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

26 Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

28 You are my God, and I will praise you!

You are my God, and I will exalt you!

29 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

Hymn StF 262 All Glory Laud and Honour

1 All glory, laud, and honour
to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.
You are the King of Israel
and David's royal Son,
now in the Lord's name coming,
the King and Blessed One.

2 The company of angels
is praising you on high;
and we with all creation
in chorus make reply.
The people of the Hebrews
with palms before you went;
our praise and prayer and anthems
before you we present.

3 To you before your passion
they sang their hymns of praise;
to you, now high exalted,
our melody we raise.
As you received their praises,
accept the prayers we bring,
for you delight in goodness,
O good and gracious King!
Psalter Hymnal, (Gray)

Prayers

We meet together in the presence of a God whose love is freedom,
whose touch is healing,
whose voice is peace.

Lord, your spirit is with us; as we join in worship;
Your Spirit is with us, as we join in service.

May your love bring freedom, your touch bring healing
And your voice be the peace that we take from this place and share with all we meet though the coming
days, that your name alone might be glorified.

Be the centre, the focus, of all we are.
Be the one we depend upon, in all decisions that we shall make, let your will, not ours be done.

To those who hunger, you are the bread of life
To those who thirst, you are the refreshing stream.
To those who mourn, you are a hand to hold.
To those in need, you are an untiring friend.
To those who question, you are the one they seek.
To those who are blind, you are their guiding feet.
To those who ask, you are the Son of God.
To those who kneel, you are the forgiving king.
We give you thanks, for all that you are to us.
Lord our Creator God.

Hymn StF 272 From Heaven You came, helpless babe (Servant King)

1.From Heaven, You came helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live

2.There in the garden of tears
My heavy load he chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
Yet not My will but Yours", He said
Chorus

Chorus

*This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King*

3.Come see His hands and His feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered
Chorus

4.So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone Him
Each other's needs to prefer
For it is Christ we're serving
Chorus

Songwriters: Graham Kendrick
The Servant King lyrics © Thank You Music Ltd., Make Way Music

Readings

Philippians 2 v 5-11

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 21:1-11

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,
2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her
colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs
them, and he will send them right away.”

4 This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

5 “Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”[a]

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and
placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while
others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him
and those that followed shouted,
“Hosanna[b] to the Son of David!”
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”[c]
“Hosanna[d] in the highest heaven!”

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Reflection

Imagine you’ve invited the country’s top rock band to play your local church. They are a good band, a great band - the best. They’ve won awards, had loads of albums and number one singles, and they’re Methodists, so are really happy to come here for free and perform a series of gigs for the town. You have a lot of planning to do, this band is going to change the

face of Methodism in Nottinghamshire for ever. You'll get so many new members, you'll need to extend the building. You'll need a bigger worship space to cope with all the people who will come to church. Tickets for the gig will fly out of your hands, the place will be packed.

The day arrives, people are outside, desperate to see the band. There are journalists, musical radio stations have sent people to cover this exciting event. Nottingham has never seen anything like it before. Cameras flash and click, the paparazzi jostle for the best place to see the band, the man from the Nottingham Post is knocked over by a teenager from Radio 1 - crowds of people are here – to see one man arrive. On his own. On a scooter. Carrying a triangle. 'Em, where's the rest of the band?' your door steward asks. 'Oh they couldn't come, sorry' you're told. 'But I've brought my triangle.'

Of course when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, a lot of the crowd understood the symbolism of his turning up on a colt, they wouldn't have been disappointed by the image he presented, they knew the scripture in Zechariah 9 v 9,

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.'

However, some of the crowd did not. Some wanted a king on a mighty war horse, followed by a vast army, not a man in sandals on a donkey, followed by some fishermen. They wanted a general, they wanted the Romans out, and Israel to be returned to her former glory. To be ruled by Jews, for Jews, with no interference from these invading conquerors. They wanted a rock star, not a man with a triangle. So, as you've just been disappointed by the rock band, so some people in Jerusalem were disappointed at Jesus' appearance on a colt.

Jesus had deliberately chosen a colt, an animal that has never been used for work before. He was sending out the message that he's the one. The one they've been waiting for, the one to bring in the new kingdom. Of course Herod Antipas rode into Jerusalem at Passover also. He came in through a different gate to Jesus, Herod used the gate at Cesarea Maratima to the east of the city. No donkey or being followed by fisherman for him of course – he came on a huge war horse, followed by many soldiers to show how powerful he was. To embody the Roman Emperor's power, and put down any challenges to the might of Rome. Jesus, in the opposite direction geographically as well as mentally, symbolised the power of God, the new kingdom he's ushering in. He's offering peace, he had no need of a war horse.

Jesus was prepared for this, his last three years had been leading up to this point and he knew that Jerusalem would be the death of him. I wonder if Jesus thought he might be able to turn things around. Did he perhaps see the crowds to greet him, listen to the shouts and wonder if perhaps he'd be able to make them listen? Did Jesus consider that people in this Holy city, might actually listen and understand? That they might suddenly think 'I get what he's on about now!' and repent, and accept his message? Probably not.

Jesus was determined, he had a path, a destiny to follow, and he knew the end was his cruel, horrifying death. His betrayal, humiliation, suffering. His mind was focussed. Jesus stepped on this road to Jerusalem knowing how it would end. He has been frustrated by people misunderstanding, and by people who just wouldn't listen because they didn't like what he had to say. He'd been thrown out of some towns, had scandalised social convention by talking to tax collectors, Samaritans, lepers, even women. But, amongst all the anger and misery he had been bombarded with, he had healed and laughed, he had been around the area meeting and greeting people, he walked on water and fed thousands of people. He calmed a storm and raised people from the dead. And he taught a prayer that we still use two thousand years later.

Perhaps he had butterflies in his stomach, that knot you get when you're going into an interview, or you're going into the doctor's surgery. Perhaps he's considered turning away from his destiny and just going back home to Nazareth to be a carpenter. I doubt that, and we'll never know for sure, but the preparations he'd made suggest he was well in control, and he had his mind focussed. Even at the Last Supper, Jesus organised the room and what they'd all eat.

In our Philippians reading, Paul tells us we need to be in the same mind as Jesus, Chapter 2, verses 7 and 8 read -

'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.

This passage by Paul was written as a poem, it was a declaration of faith in who Jesus was and what he accomplished. Paul recognised the determination with which Jesus met his fate, particularly his last week, from Palm Sunday onwards. Paul tells his readers to be of the same mind set as Jesus. When they deal with one another, he says, be equal, think of God, who emptied himself, took on the form of a human, being born as a baby, and he became obedient, even going so far as to die for us.

Palm Sunday is a strange day in some respects. Jesus comes into Jerusalem in a flurry of activity, there are pilgrims coming into the city for Passover, and of course Jesus has his disciples and followers with him. They shout for joy at his arrival, 'Hosanna' they cry. 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' They've heard of this man Jesus, they are excited and expect great things. They are headed for disappointment, and by the end of the week they are easily swayed to the Pharisees way of thinking. Jesus spends the week in his usual manner, teaching, going around still trying to get his message out there. He plans for his last night with his friends, knowing one will betray him. He couldn't plan for the next day, how could he? All he can do to prepare for Good Friday is pray to his Father. His mind is set on this path. On Palm Sunday he could easily have said 'I've changed my mind, I'm not going in'. But of course he doesn't. He is from God, he is with God, and he is God.

Palm Sunday is also a call to communal faith, it is showing other people where your faith lies, what you believe, and who you believe in. These people who met Jesus on that day

were making a statement about their faith. They knew they needed Jesus – they had seen his miracles, his healing and teaching, they knew he had what they needed. These people are the ordinary people of the day, some have come from villages around the city, some from even further afield. This is his triumphal entry into the city, and although in a couple of days' time some will have lost faith because he hasn't become the warrior they were expecting, many others understand the symbolism of his arrival, they grasp the image he is portraying, and they do remain faithful. They need him to save them, they have gathered together in a 'courageous proclamation' as one of my commentaries put it. They are stating their loyalty to Christ, not a politician or royalty. We see people throughout history standing together to act against a wrong that needs to be changed.

The Confessing Church in 1930s Germany showed their loyalty to Christ and not to Hitler. Men and women offered safety and a way out of slavery in 19th century America, by forming an underground railway system. In 1944, South African youths got together to form the African National Congress Youth League, under the leadership of a young Nelson Mandela. They were working towards a fairer world, where the colour of your skin did not affect your life in negative ways. It took a long time for this to be rectified in South Africa, but they did end Apartheid eventually.

We are always stronger together. We live amongst ordinary people because we are ordinary people. Jesus followers were not the rich and famous, they were the farmers and labourers, the workers, the carpenters and cooks. They 'came in the name of the Lord'. There is power when we act together, especially when we do it in the name of Christ.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, which we'll hear more about in the coming week, Jesus prays to God to take this horrible fate away. But then, crucially, he says 'but not my will, thy will be done'. He hands it over to God, because his mind is on God, and he knows what needs to happen and why. God could have changed it all, he could have wiped the Romans out with a swish of his hand and handed Jerusalem back to the Jewish nation, but he didn't.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem might not always seem particularly triumphant – his triumph didn't last long, and he was crucified only a week later, and yet the people flooded the streets to see him. They gathered together to see this rock star personality. Some soon left him, but others remained faithful. Even after his death, they remained faithful. Then on his resurrection, they could claim 'we knew we were right!' but they were together on Palm Sunday, thousands shouting 'Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'. Let us act together, let all of us go out into the streets and with one voice shout to the people who don't know Jesus Christ – 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' And you never know, someone might just ask – 'can you tell me more about Jesus please? wouldn't that be marvellous?

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Pray for peace in Ukraine and around the world, for all the people who live where bombs are falling, where their lives are in danger.

For the governments around the world, that they will seek peace, and think only of the good of their people and how to serve you, Lord our God.

Pray for Syria and Turkey, still recovering after the devastating earthquake.

Pray for your church, and all the circuit churches. For flourishing, and Spirit filled worship.

Pray for yourself, your family and friends, and all those you know who need prayers especially at the moment. Pray for those who need God the most, and those who think they need God the least.

Hymn StF 351 In Christ Alone

1. In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

2. In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones he came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied –
For every sin on him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

3. There in the ground his body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave he rose again!
And as he stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am his and he is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.
Stuart Townend.

4. No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from his hand:
Till he returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Blessing

May God grant us peace, may he be in our hearts and minds,
In our whole lives, may his grace surround us and his mercy flow through us.
May God live with us, through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord, in the name of Christ.
Amen.