



A SERVICE OF REFLECTION FOR PALM SUNDAY, 5TH APRIL 2020.

You are invited to light a candle and to lay beside it, a palm cross, if you have one.

WE COME TO WORSHIP AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Though we may be physically apart, we ARE one; we are the church of God, a gathered community, brought together in the bonds of peace, assembled today in thought and concern, in spirit, in love and in prayer. We offer up to the Lord, with thankfulness, the night that has now passed, and the day that lies before us.

We hold a moment of silence as we prepare.

PALM SUNDAY ACCLAMATION FROM ZECHARIAH 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

AS WE GATHER IN WORSHIP, WE PRAY

Lord Jesus Christ we come to be with you in many different places, yet as one community. We offer up our shouts of praise, for the day is approaching when we celebrate our salvation through Your victory over mortal corruption. But on this particular day, we recall that you turned your face resolutely towards the darkness of Jerusalem, and as the crowds cheered you on your way, you knew how easily their praises would slip away, like “fickle-sand” through fingers, trodden into the earth without due regard.

Reflect upon the words of the following hymn prayerfully; alternatively sing it or click on the link below to hear it, and sing along with King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

<https://youtu.be/q-gDQSjnzH8>

HYMN STF 265

Ride on, ride on in majesty !
Hark, all the tribes ‘Hosanna !’ cry ;
your humble beast pursues its road
with palms and scattered garments
strowed.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die :
O Christ, your triumphs now begin
o’er captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on, ride on in majesty !
The wingèd squadrons of the sky
look down with sad and wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.

Ride on, ride on in majesty !
Your last and fiercest strife is nigh ;
the Father, on his sapphire throne,
expects his own anointed Son.

Ride on, ride on in majesty !
In lowly pomp ride on to die ;
bow your meek head to mortal pain,
then take, O God, your power, and reign.



***The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
by Ukrainian artist Oleksandr Antonyuk***

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Jesus rode into Jerusalem not as a victorious king but in meekness, upon a donkey. He came as the Servant King, ready to fulfill the sorrowful task for which he had been born into this world.

Forgive, me Lord for those times when I have thought too much of myself. Remind me that you ask from me a life devoted to serving you, and my neighbours, whoever they may be. Enable me to take off my garment of self-righteousness and to lay it down at your feet in humility and repentance. **Amen**

WORDS OF ASSURANCE FROM PSALM 32:5

'Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" and you forgave the guilt of my sin.' **Thanks be to God.**

THE READING MATTHEW 21: 1-11 ***Jesus' Triumphal 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 fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, '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.'

COMMENTARY

Lining the streets to cheer a VIP was not an unusual occurrence for us as children. We were often walked with the school to the end of the road, and waited with HUGE excitement for the PRESIDENT to come by! We plucked off the low branches of the Jacaranda trees to wave, and then with a whoosh of air, the cavalcade would fly past with the president waving his trade-mark white handkerchief out of the window at us! I don't think we ever got to see Kenneth Kaunda- only his hankie!

But August 1979, was a different matter altogether. In fact, it was such an important occasion that my mother made herself a new dress. (Apparently it mattered what you wore, so she thought!) We got there early to get a good spot and at the appointed time, stepped HM the Queen from a large black car! We were so close to her and marvelled at the way in which she was the most exquisite, flawless person we had ever seen! She did a walk about, in the bright sunlight and rightly made a beeline for those with small children who had stood and waited at great "fidgety" cost. Alas she made no mention of my mother's new dress, something that we joked about for many years!

The common factor in these events were children waiting, greeting and cheering. On my first Good Friday in Abingdon, I waited as part of the procession of witness to St Nicolas Church, to join solemnly in prayer with the wider church community. As we walked silently, I noticed many children tugging at the sleeves of their shopping

focussed parents, to find out what was happening.

It led me to contemplate the composition and motive of the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem and the effect it had on the occupying forces.

Misguided parents, eager to see the overthrow of the occupying forces, perhaps rallied and urged their children to get ready and to go out to greet their saviour, and if we read further into the chapter, we see children shouting out their praises to Jesus, causing great indignation amongst the chief priests.

“Hosanna to the Son of David!” Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

It was, so they perhaps thought, a day to be remembered and talked of for generations to come. A day that was not dissimilar, nor too far away in the memories of both Jews and Romans, when the great Jewish hero, Judas Maccabaeus rode into Jerusalem in 165 BC after ousting the Syrian ruler, Antiochus IV, who had desecrated the Temple.

On that occasion Judas Maccabaeus was met with cheering and the waving of palm branches, and shouts of *“Ana Yehovah, hoshi’ah-na”* *“Now Lord, save us!”* ever to be echoed at the Feast of the Tabernacles.

In the light of such a memory, the enthusiasm would have been infectious; inhibitions dropped as coats dropped to the ground for Jesus to walk upon, an act not of chivalry but of submission paid to royalty (see the 2nd book of Kings 9:13, where people threw their garments down and proclaimed Jehu as King. *“Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, ‘Jehu is king.’*)

And so, the people of Jerusalem welcomed their King in unquantifiable expectation! This inevitably made the city a bubbling pot of emotion and the Chief priests, the Pharisees and the Romans would undeniably have become rather twitchy, understanding Jesus’ actions as a military overthrow, which would have had huge consequences for the carefully poised balance of power.

Within a crowd of any type, lies the unconscious emotions of many individuals that can so easily be released through a “trigger- action”. It can either be a force for change in a positive way, such as seen in the Civil Rights Movement in America, or they can have the potential to release the bullets of fear, aggression, scapegoating and rage, and we do not have to look too far back in history to see the latter; Kristallnacht for instance, and the whole of the Nazi regime, was fuelled by mass rallies, which served to authorise and validate the loss of inhibitions of perfectly normal people, who abandoned their moral compass and lost their individual responsibility. And of course we know that Jesus was subjected to both.

The triumphal entry, followed by the cleansing of the Temple, was clearly reminiscent of the Great Judas Maccabaeus, who went on to cleanse the defiled temple, and the crowd had gone out with all good intention. They had been deeply affected by Jesus and just HAD to be there. It was an unmissable event! In some respects they had got it right.

- They praised him
- They gave him honour
- And they proclaimed him

But in so many respects they had got him all wrong. Yes, he had come into the city through the gates, like any triumphal king

of the era would have done, and although they received him like the messianic king, they longed for, they still were not really sure of who he was.

Within that crowd lay dormant, the unconscious and fickle, self-interested and blind emotions, that went hand in hand with ambiguity, disillusionment and discontent, which were ready to be released like a bullet in a “trigger action” of scapegoating and haranguing, until they mercilessly call for his crucifixion.

The pendulum began to swing slowly in the opposite direction for Jesus and I am always left with wondering what the children said and asked, as they watched the same rabbi that they had praised, trudge towards his crucifixion?

“Out of the mouth of babes” they say. (Psalm 8) Were the children the “inconsequential,” collective conscience/moral compass of the crowd? And on Good Friday did they tug at their parents sleeves and ask the difficult questions? Did they receive embarrassed and mumbling responses, or were they just ignored?

Every time I sing the hymn “Ride on Ride On in Majesty” my heart breaks over and again, for Jesus and every year that goes by, I hope even more and pray even harder, that the children reached out to touch Jesus, as he walked to his death and that from their vulnerability, he gained strength and comfort.

PRAYER

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. We adore you O Christ, and we bless you; by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

We pause to pray for all who feel vulnerable and alone at present.

Lord give strength

We pause to pray for all who lead by example, and work sacrificially for the good of others.

Lord give strength

We pause to pray for all those who are unable to celebrate and to mourn in the way they would like.

Lord give strength

We pause to pray for family and friends, and our church family

Lord give strength

We pause to pray for children, in this country and beyond

Lord give strength

We pause to pray for ourselves as we journey towards Easter, and as we hold silence, we call to mind the message of hope and joy that our risen Lord brings.

Lord give us peace.

LORD'S PRAYER

EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE *If you have lit a candle, you are invited to extinguish it now, as a reminder of the journey into the darkness that Jesus took.*

There is no deeper mystery than this; that the light came into the world, became flesh and dwelt amongst us. As we extinguish the light we commit to journeying with Christ to the cross, and await in hope for his inextinguishable light of life to be rekindled within us. **AMEN**

BLESSING

Blessed is the one who goes in the name of the Lord.

We go in the peace and blessing of Christ, proclaiming him as our Lord and King!

Thanks be to God.