

Palm Sunday service

From the United Reformed Church in Morpeth,
Widdrington and Gt. Bavington

Opening words

Hymn: Make way, make way for Christ the King

Make way, make way
For Christ the King
In splendour arrives
Fling wide the gates and welcome Him
Into your lives

Make way! (Make way!)
Make way! (Make way!)
For the King of kings (For the King of kings)
Make way! (Make way!)
Make way! (Make way!)
And let His kingdom in

He comes the broken hearts to heal
The prisoners to free
The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance
The blind shall see

And those who mourn with heavy hearts
Who weep and sigh
With laughter, joy and royal crown
He'll beautify

We call you now to worship Him
As Lord of all
To have no gods before Him
Their thrones must fall!

Graham Kendrick
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Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
we greet you today as the Word made flesh,
before all,
beyond all,
within all-
the one in whom all things have their being,
yet entering into our world of space and time,
sharing our humanity
experiencing the joys and sorrows of flesh and blood,
living and dying among us
so that we might share in the joy of your kingdom.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

We greet you as Messiah,
the Son of David,
King of Israel -

Servant of all,
Saviour of all,
anointed for burial,
crowned with thorns,
and lifted high on a cross -
your kingdom not of this world.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

We greet you as Lord of the empty tomb -
the risen Christ,
victorious over death,
triumphant over evil
the one who has gone before us
whose Spirit walks with us now,
and who will be there to greet us at our journey's end
-
Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

We greet you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
the ascended and exalted Lamb of God,
ruler of the ends of the earth,
enthroned in splendour,
worthy of all honour and glory and blessing -
the King of Glory!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Lord Jesus Christ,
we greet you today with joyful worship and reverent
praise.
Hear our prayer,
and accept our homage,
for we offer it in your name and to your glory,
AMEN
(Taken from "Prayers for All Seasons Book 2 by Nick Fawcett)

Reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Reading: Luke 19: 28-40

Meditation: "Stony Silence"

In the bible readings today we see the crowd shouting, we think about all those who were watching Jesus' procession into that Holy City and imagine the myriad of expectations and hopes and worries that were all tied up in his arrival there that day. We've even imagined the stones shouting.

Usually the churches today would be filled with people. Palm Sunday has remained a significant Sunday on the churches calendar. This Sunday would be a day of celebration and singing praise, before we turn our minds to the events of Holy Week. But today the church is empty. There is a hush. Jesus says in that

passage from Luke's gospel: "If my followers keep quiet, the stones themselves will cry out."

I wonder what the stones here today would say if they could speak:

An imagined conversation with Gordon (one of the carved stone faces that adorn the outside of St George's URC)

Julian Gordon, is that you?
Gordon Yes, of course its me.
Julian I was just talking about stones.
 About how Jesus said the stones
 of Jerusalem would shout out.
Gordon Quite a few of them did, you
 know. Well that's what we
 carvings believe.
Julian Did they wave palms as well?
Gordon Don't be daft. They are stones.
 They haven't got any hands. The
 most we can do is to wobble
 our moss back and forth.
 Anyway like I said, we carvings,
 we tell the stories of how the
 stones of the Temple gave a
 great shout that morning. Only
 no-one could hear it because
 everyone was singing and
 talking so loud.
Julian A bit like us when we used to
 meet on Sunday's here in
 church. Did you used to hear
 us?
Gordon Of course I heard you. You
 always woke me up.
Julian You were asleep?
Gordon Well, I had a late night. I was
 out clubbing with my gargoyle
 friends.
Julian Oh! Where do gargoyles go at
 night then?
Gordon They go out on the tiles, of
 course.
Julian I wish I hadn't asked
Gordon Anyway, you haven't been
 making a lot of noise here
 lately.
Julian Well, we haven't been able to
 meet together in church, but we
 are looking to the time when
 we might be back again and
 then it will be a real celebration.
Gordon And do you think you might
 make as much noise as the
 crowds waving their palms
 when Jesus entered Jerusalem?
Julian I don't know. Perhaps not.
 Maybe we're too reserved. Stiff

Gordon upper lip, and all that
 Or maybe you are not thinking
 straight. Because you know
 every time two or three of you
 gather together in here, Jesus
 walks in through the front door,
 as it were. Imagine that. Every
 time you folk gather for
 worship, he enters this place in
 triumph.
Julian I suppose you're right
Gordon And what does he get from you
 lot? Hardly a murmur.
 Sometimes you're so wrapped
 up in your own thoughts that
 you don't even notice he's
 around.
Julian Well its difficult. Its not like it
 was then. He's not riding a
 donkey through the streets.
Gordon Maybe not, but he's still here.
 And isn't that something to get
 excited about? Now if you'll
 excuse me I need to catch up on
 my beauty sleep.
Julian Yes, well, that;s going to take
 quite a lot of sleep if you ask
 me.
Gordon Snores
Julian Gordon? Gordon? Oh, he's
 gone.

*(adapted from an idea in Celebrations! All Age
Worship by Nick and Claire Page)*

Hymn: You are the King of glory

You Are The King Of Glory
You Are The Prince Of Peace
You Are The Lord Of Heaven And Earth
You Are The Son Of Righteousness
Angels Bow Down Before You
They Worship And Adore;
For You Have The Words Of Eternal Life
You Are Jesus Christ The Lord
Hosanna To The Son Of David
Hosanna To The King Of Kings
Glory In The Highest Heavens
Jesus The Messiah Reigns

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Sermon

There was a woman who spent some months serving God in Kenya. On her final visit to a remote township she attended a medical clinic. As the Maasai women

there began to sing together, she found herself deeply moved by their beautiful harmonies.

She wanted always to remember this moment and try to share it with friends when she arrived home. With tears flowing down her cheeks, she turned to her friend and asked "Can you please tell me the translation of the words to this song?"

Her friend looked at her and solemnly replied "If you boil the water, you won't get dysentery"

You know we can so easily misunderstand situations that we find ourselves in.

On this palm Sunday we reflect on the joy of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, it is a time of celebration, and with all those people attending the Passover, we wave our palm branches and welcome this king who rides on a donkey.

The disciples along with the crowd get caught up in these celebrations, they are waving their branches too, along with everyone else. Proclaiming this Jesus as the king and the messiah who will bring down the ruling authorities.

But they miss the point, they misunderstand the situation they find themselves in.

In the gospels we are told of the times that Jesus takes the twelve disciples aside , and as they set off to Jerusalem, Jesus specifically says to them : 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.'

But here, when they finally reach the gates of Jerusalem, all thoughts of death and crucifixion have fallen away and they get caught up in the worship and celebration of this new king who will overthrow the city. I am sure they are thinking: "Well, we know what Jesus said, but he couldn't really mean it could he. He was speaking figuratively, he can't possible die without fulfilling what we set out to do."

And we wonder how these disciples, who have been told by Jesus clearly about the events that will occur in Jerusalem, can join in that celebration parade?

We see time and time again the disciples ongoing disbelief that what Jesus says about his death will come true. The disciples missed the reality of what Jesus was about to do.

We will not be able to again this year have public processions or outdoor services. We will not be able to share the Good Friday events with the public who might witness what we do on the streets. Perhaps that is a good thing, because there are some who say that the public only ever see us processing very solemnly on Good Friday, but that they never get to see the joy of our celebrations that go on in our churches on Easter Sunday.

But I also think that the opposite is true too. We are in danger too of missing Good Friday altogether. Those who work, or are on the fringes of church. Even those who follow the lectionary readings from Sunday to Sunday miss out on the events of Good Friday. We go from the celebration of the entry into Jerusalem this Sunday, to the celebration of Easter Sunday morning next week.

Many people miss out the Good Friday bit. Many people miss out on purpose because it is too hard to take. Because they don't like that bit of the story.

This Palm Sunday, amid all our cries of Hosanna wherever we may be, we have to recognise that in just a few days these cries will to turn to cries of Crucify him. No matter how much we or the disciples want to avoid it, the cross has to be faced.

There are times too when we are tempted to miss out those bits of the Bible that offend our own view of who God is. Like the stories of the Old Testament when whole nations are being slaughtered by the Israelites who have God as their champion. But we also miss out those bits that unsettle our view of what it means to be Christian.

We are in danger of avoiding the bits of the story we don't like. Always Hosanna and never Crucify. We are quite happy to jump from Palm Sunday to Easter morning, without passing a thought about the bit inbetween.

But the reality is, that our lives as Christians, that when we read the story of the Bible, it is not all joy and celebration. There are times of suffering and sadness too. Somebody once said "When we long for a life without difficulties, remind us that oaks grow strong in contrary winds, and diamonds are made under pressure." Our Christian life cannot be a life without difficulty.

If the Bible or Church or our view of the Christian life is only about the good bits, then where do we turn to when life gets tough?

Easter for our family has always revolved around Spring Harvest, a large Christian event held at various places around the country. Rob Parsons at Spring Harvest one year told a story of a man in Colorado Springs., A man who had devoted his life to God and was about to set off with his family to become a missionary. But one day as they were getting in to their car outside church, one of his daughters turned round and saw a gunman walking across the car park lot.

In the next instant he heard a shot ring out, and his daughter fall to the ground. He struggled to get out of the car to check if she was alright, and he heard more shots, and noticed that he himself had been hit. Lying on the floor of his car, he cried out to God, Why is this happening to me? We were going to serve you and be missionaries? Why is this happening?

And the father says that he heard a voice saying "We are not going around this - I am not taking this away - we are going through this."

In that incident he lost his daughter and was injured himself and spent weeks in hospital - but he knew those words were from God - "we are going through this."

We face many difficulties in life, and sometimes we want God to take them away, so that they are no longer there. Sometimes we ask God to bypass them for us, so that they are still there but we can find a way around them. But sometimes God says to us "We are going right through the middle of this - together"

As Jesus kneels in the Garden of Gethsemane he prays to God " If it is your will, take this cup of suffering away from me"

Sometimes our cup is overflowing with joy and blessing, sometimes we have to drink from the cup of suffering. Jesus says "Father, if it is possible, take this cup away from me"

And God says "I could take it away. We could find another way of doing this. But we are going through this" We cannot bypass Good Friday. After today we cannot just skip from Palm Sunday to Easter morning. Easter means nothing unless we know that Jesus has faced the cross, and gone through death and come out the other side.

It is when we see ourselves in God's story - knowing that there are hard times and suffering for God's people - but God is with us in this - and leads us through to the other side - that is when we can find strength and comfort in our times of suffering.

At the last supper, on the night before he died, Jesus sat with his followers and closest friends. Jesus took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying "Drink from it all of you"

Prayers of Intercession

Gentle Christ,
you set your face to Jerusalem -
the place of trial,
of torture and death -

Surrounded by noise,
by expectation and hope;
love unknown,
vulnerability unrecognized.

Gentle Christ,
we will walk with you;
we will weep with you;
we will watch with you;

Our eyes on you,
our hearts on you,
our lives for you;

In humility,
in awe,
in peace.
AMEN

("The one who comes in the name of the Lord" by Rachel Poolman from the URC Prayer Handbook 2021)

Hymn: Ride on, Ride on in majesty

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry;
Thine humble beast pursues his road
with palms and scattered garments strowed.

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

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Thy 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 thy meek head to mortal pain,
then take, O God, thy pow'r and reign.

H H Milman

Blessing