

Palm Sunday 2021

Intro music: Hozanna StF 263 utube Wow Worship: Hozanna by Carl Tuttle

As God's family, separated by circumstance yet united by faith, we join together in worship. We remember our Christian brothers and sisters worldwide also celebrating Palm Sunday, this special day when Jesus rode on a donkey into the Holy City of Jerusalem. In our service I invite you to think about the deep symbolism of this event, what it meant to the crowds of Jesus' day living under the harsh Roman oppression, longing for a Messiah to save them. And what does it mean for us now. First some verses from a Psalm which would have been recited by Jesus and his followers:

Psalm 118 verses 25/26

Lord, save us! 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 for ever. Amen.

So let us truly feel part of the global Christian family with our hymn:

StF 57 Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!

YouTube: Luckington congregation singing recorded 11 Feb 2014

Let all the world, in every corner sing, my God and King!
The heavens are not too high, his praise may thither fly;
The earth is not too low, his praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!

Let all the world, in every corner sing, my God and King!
The church with psalms must shout, no door can keep them out;
But above all the heart must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!.

George Herbert 1593-1633

Prayer

So much is happening around the world, and, perhaps certain things have cropped up in our own lives this week that before we go any further, we need a time of prayer: (candle picture).

Eternal God, we lift up our hearts to celebrate Palm Sunday. Lord Jesus Christ, draw close to us as we recreate in our minds your momentous entry into Jerusalem. May we open our minds to the meaning of this story to gain deeper understanding, faith and hope. Holy Spirit, comfort and strengthen us in our individual homes that we may truly feel part of our world-wide Christian family, echoing the age-old lines: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession:

We pray now for our hurting world; for the innocent caught up in wars of other peoples' making; for the hungry, frightened and dispossessed, those who have lost all hope. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We lift before our God our country; we pray for those caught in the rising tide of unemployment, those in hospital who will soon be home and those whose lives are ending. We give thanks for incredible medical advances, for dedicated staff, for all those whose working lives enable others to feel safe and valued. We pray for all involved in education, and for those who enable us to have food and comfort.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our minister Pauline, the Stewards and the whole church family. May the strange and disturbing experience of Covid bring us to value each other's care and prayers. We bring to Jesus those we love and care for, those whose needs are heavy on our hearts. Softly speak their name in your heart and imagine Jesus standing by their side. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Lord of light and love, we dare to pray for ourselves. Be strength for our weakness, calm for our anxieties, and open our eyes to the miracle and gift of each day.

We pray in the name of our Saviour who taught his followers to say together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

This event was such a highpoint in our Lord's ministry that its recorded by all the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Today, we look at the story from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 21 and verses 1 – 11.

Reading Matthew 21: 1 – 11

As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them: "Go to the village ahead of you, and you will find a donkey tied there, with a colt by her side. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell them that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Zechariah: 'Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey...'

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'

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

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

Egeria quote: The world has always seen intrepid travellers and in the 4th.century, a nun called Egeria travelled in the footsteps of Jesus. She spent 3 years living in Jerusalem and from across the years we hear her vivid recollection of how early Christians commemorated Palm Sunday:

‘The bishop and all the people rise from their places, and start off down from the summit of the Mount of Olives. The babies and the ones too young to walk are carried on their parent’s shoulders. Everyone is carrying branches, either of palm or olive, and they accompany the bishop in the very way the people did when once they went down with the Lord. They go on foot all down the mount to the city, and all through the city to the main church, but they have to go pretty gently on account of the older women and men among them who might get tired.’

What a joyful picture that conjures up for us! In normal times hundreds of pilgrims would be walking down the Mount of Olives, singing and waving their palms as the procession enters the city gate.

Now for a hymn that has been sung on Palm Sunday for over 1,000 years:

Hymn StF 262 All glory laud, and honour: YouTube 280 Sanctuary Choir

All glory, laud, and honour to thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring!
Thou art the King of Israel, thou David’s royal Son,
Who in the Lord’s name comest, the King and Blessed One.

The company of angels are praising thee on high,
And mortal men and all things created make reply.
The people of the Hebrews with palms before thee went;
Our praise and prayer and anthems before thee we present.

To thee before thy Passion they sang their hymns of praise;
To thee now high exalted our melody we raise.
Thou didst accept their praises, accept the prayers we bring,
Who in all good delightest, thou good and gracious king.

All glory, laud and honour to thee, Redeemer King,
To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring!

St. Theodulph of Orleans 9th. century

Reflection

(picture of Jesus entering Jerusalem through palm waving crowd)

Is this how we see Jesus ? A happy celebration, everyone full of hope? Jesus the prophet from Nazareth, this healer and teacher and A list celebrity of the moment? Arguably this was the pinnacle of our Lord’s earthly ministry and a direct statement of who he was. For his supporters, Jews occupied and governed by Roman

authority - as well as his detractors, The High Priest, Pharisees and Saducees - this image fizzed with symbolism and expectation. Lets take a quick glance into their Scripture, our Old Testament: In old age, King David instructed his servants to put his son Solomon on his own mule and in the valley outside Jerusalem, Zadok the priest and Nathan the Prophet anointed Solomon King. (1 Kings 1:32-34 & 40). And there's more – when Jehu became King of Israel we read: 'They hurried and took their cloaks and spread them under him.... They blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!" (2Kings 9:13).

If that wasn't enough the prophet Zechariah announced in around 480 BC:

'Rejoice greatly.....see your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.' (Zechariah 9:9)

Then only 160 years before, Judas Maccabeus led the Jewish revolt against Syrian Greeks who had desecrated the Temple. He rode in triumph into Jerusalem on a donkey. Not on a war-horse but on a donkey the symbol of humility and peace.

Who is this ? **This is our King!** Delight for Jesus' followers but in front of his enemies that was political and religious suicide. (picture of Pharisees)

This leads us on to think about palm branches. For the people of Israel the palm branch was a symbol of their national identity, the meaning which embodied victory, freedom, and salvation. Waving palm branches around Jesus was like waving national flags in the face of the foreign, colonial power. So ingrained was this potent symbol that ancient bronze coins bore the image of a palm branch – and even today, on the New Israeli 10 Shekel piece – yes, there is the palm! (picture of current 10 shekel coin)

What we like to call Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem was also the beginning of the end. This Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, those tense days leading to our Lord's crucifixion.

This is the week that compresses a whole patchwork of human life: joy and celebration, high expectations, fear, desolation, pain and failure. Our lives can feel like a roller-coaster of emotions and events outside our control, we experience a raft of events, difficulties and joys, anxieties, strength and weakness.

I have my Palm cross from a couple of years ago. It gives me confidence that the end of human life is the beginning of life in a new dimension, the mystery of eternity with the great company of saints and God himself; as the apostle Paul wrote to his friends in Corinth: "But thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

How we long for victory today- not just over the immediacy of Covid 19 but over all the pain and sickness suffered by so many in body, mind and spirit. We pray for victory over suffering, hunger, poverty, racial tensions, inequality and all the devastating evils of war. Jesus shows us the way of peace and ultimate victory –

"Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in me...because I live you also will live." (John 14: 1 & 19)

What does Palm Sunday mean to you? If you were asked: "Who is this?" How would you answer? Who is Jesus in your life?

May we be able to share this hymn verse as a prayer of dedication:

Jesus my Shepherd, Brother, Friend, my Prophet, Priest and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, accept the praise I bring.

My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End. Amen.

John Newton 1725-1807

This rousing and joyous hymn draws our worship to a close

Hymn StF 319 Christ triumphant utube from Chet Valley Churches

Christ triumphant, ever reigning, Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining, hear us as we sing:
Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, the eternal name!

Word incarnate, truth revealing, Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing by your humble birth:
Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, the eternal name!

Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated, victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated, sinners justified:
Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, the eternal name!

Priestly king, enthroned for ever high in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never stifle hymns of love;
Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, the eternal name.

So, our hearts and voices raising through the ages long,
Ceaselessly upon you gazing, this shall be our song:
Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, the eternal name!

Michael Saward (b1932)

Blessing

Wherever we are, we are all in the same place, held in God's eternal love. So may the peace of God which passes all our human understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ our Lord, and may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon us and upon those for whom we have prayed, today and always. Amen.

Final music for credits repeat Hosanna from the Intro

