

ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE
28th MARCH 2021- PALM SUNDAY

INTRODUCTION

It's a very special day today and the start of a very special week – today's the day when Jesus borrows a donkey and rides into Jerusalem, with everyone cheering and crowds surging to catch a glimpse of him. All over the world Christians are waving palm branches today – some might even have a real donkey to process round with. But since all the donkeys I know of are booked out for today – we'll just have to make do!

Opening Hymn – the King Arrives!

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.

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

Today we meet in the presence of our Lord to remember his entrance into Jerusalem, the crowd responding with palm branches and praises; the excitement and enthusiasm; the fulfilment of promises contained in Scripture. This massing of the ordinary people is in sharp contrast to our lockdown reality. In the past, we were able to meet in person, to perhaps wave palm branches, and to sing well-loved hymns of worship. As we remember a year of global pandemic, we are aware of the losses suffered by so many. We are also conscious of the faithfulness of our God, and of the new opportunities to reach out to those in our community.

We come together to begin this celebration in union with the Church throughout the world. Christ enters his own city to complete his work as our Saviour, to suffer, to die, and to rise again. Let us go with him in faith and love, so that, united with him in his sufferings, we may share his risen life.

**Hosanna to the Son of David, the King of Israel.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

[You may wish to hold up your Palm branches, Palm Cross or paper Palm leaf whilst the following prayer is said]

God our Saviour, whose Son Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem as Messiah to suffer and to die; let these palms be for us signs of his victory and grant that we who bear them in his name may ever hail him as our King, and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

CALL TO WORSHIP

We meet in the presence of God
**who knows our needs, hears our cries,
feels our pain and heals our wounds.**

**Loving God, we have come to worship.
Help us to pray to you in faith,
to sing your praise with gratitude,
and to listen to your word with eagerness;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

TURNING AGAIN TO GOD

Christ the light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts.

In his light let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

We are often slow to follow the example of Christ.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We often fail to be known as Christ's disciples,
Christ have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

We often fail to walk the way of the cross.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A PSALM 118.1-2,19-29

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

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.

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

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

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

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

**This is the day the LORD has made.
We will rejoice and be glad in it.**

Please, LORD, please save us.

Please, LORD, please give us success.

**Bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless you from the house of the LORD.**

The LORD is God, shining upon us.

Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on 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 faithful love endures forever.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING

JOHN 12.12-16

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John
Glory to you, O Lord.

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord- the King of Israel!"

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

"Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

REFLECTION (by Margaret Mandrell)

When I was 21, I travelled to Israel, and was in Jerusalem during the Easter festival. I will always remember the pilgrims in procession, singing with joy and expectation, praising God in different languages, representing very varied

cultures and ethnic groups. The noise, the excitement, the colour, the vibrancy all added to the overwhelming nature of the experience. It was awe inspiring to walk in the footsteps of our Saviour, to visit the places where he had ministered.

By the time Jesus entered Jerusalem, he had upset every vested interest, and challenged the established leaders of the Jewish faith. He had reached out to the poor and the marginalised, showing them the kingdom of God, and their place in it. He spoke out against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and the elitist Sadducees, who controlled the Temple, and dominated the ruling council. Some thought that Rome was about to be overthrown, others that Jesus would become their king, and some, that he was indeed the long-expected Messiah. The sense of anticipation must have been tangible within the throng of believers, the curious, the sceptical, and the observers.

Jean Vanier says "Our human hearts need something beyond the limitations and frustrations of the daily grind. We thirst for a happiness which seems unattainable on earth. We crave

the infinite, the universal, the eternal – something which gives a sense to human life and its irksome daily routines. A festival is a sign of heaven. It symbolizes our deepest aspiration – an experience of total communion."

I have always found comfort in the words which speak of God's love and compassion "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." The message of the gospel is one of acceptance and love, of forgiveness, restoration and relationship. God loves, accepts and cares for each one of his children. The Bible is a story of love, of God reaching out to people in order to restore a relationship with them. We are reassured that God is a "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

In Acts we have the story of the growth of the Church after Pentecost, the spreading of the gospel, the good news, throughout the Roman world. It is the account of Jesus' followers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, reaching out to share the message of hope and new life through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel messengers were not educated or trained but were enthusiastic in sharing the story of the transforming power of the kingdom of God.

This story, our personal journey of faith, is the same today, and is based on trust, faith and obedience. We have hope for the future and are privileged to live in the light of eternity.

The church, particularly in the last year, has had to find new ways of reaching out to people, and many have encountered the gospel message through social media. Those who would have been reluctant to enter a church building have heard the gospel and have encountered God's love through his people. This has been a time when isolation and fear have increased, when anxiety levels have risen, and death has become very real for many.

We, as followers of Christ, can pray for those who are struggling, we can offer support through telephone calls or socially distanced visits, we can shop for neighbours, and we can show God's love through our actions and words. We may not be able to celebrate Palm Sunday as we would like to, but we are assured of God's presence with us, and can experience the joy of knowing we are part of God's family, each one of us a precious child of our loving heavenly Father.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Let us affirm our faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

**Though he was divine,
he did not cling to equality with God,
but made himself nothing.**

**Taking the form of a slave,
he was born in human likeness.
He humbled himself
and was obedient to death,
even the death of the cross.**

**Therefore God has raised him on high,
and given him the name above every name:
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow,
and every voice proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

PRAYERS

To the bidding: Lord of the cross, we come to you
Please respond: you can make us whole

Lord of the cross, we come to you
you can make us whole

Christ, broken on the cross, we draw near to you,
we come with broken promises and broken dreams,
we come as a church divided,
yet we seek through you to share in salvation,
and to bring others to your saving love.

Lord, as you give yourself to us,
may we give ourselves to others.

Silence

Lord of the cross, we come to you.

You can make us whole.

We pray for nations where there is conflict and oppression.
Bless those who work to bring peace and justice.

We pray for communities torn apart by hatred.

Silence

Lord of the cross, we come to you.

You can make us whole.

We pray for homes where there is discord, deceit and betrayal,
and where violence is a constant threat.

We bring before you the broken hearted, the abused
and those with broken relationships.

Silence

Lord of the cross, we come to you.

You can make us whole

We hold before you all who are in any kind of trouble,
sickness or need.

May they know the comfort of your presence
and the healing power of your love.

We pray especially for Adrina and Alan Price, David New,
Anna Clements and Aaron.

And in a moment of silence we hold before you
those known only to us and to you.

Silence

Lord of the cross, we come to you.

You can make us whole

We remember all who have lost loved ones,
for the workers who have comforted the dying,
for those in care homes and their carers.
Comfort the bereaved and the sorrowing
especially those who have lost loved ones during this
pandemic.

We remember those who have recently died, especially Brian
Thurgood.

And we remember with love and gratitude: Dennis Shaw, John
Crutchley, Stewart Nichols, Dennis Roxburgh, Beverley Clarke,
Bill Poole, Marian Stinton, Pat Carpenter and Sheila Wilshaw.

Grant us, with them, a share in your eternal kingdom.

Silence

Lord of the cross, we come to you.

You can make us whole

Merciful Father,

Accept these prayers,

**for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

We pray the Lord's Prayer together as Jesus taught us, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily
bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who
sin against us.
Lead us not into
temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the
power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**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 who
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 and ever.
Amen.**

THE MOOD CHANGES... WE GO FORWARD INTO HOLY WEEK

Holy Week starts today on Palm Sunday, and for the rest of this week, the Church will be hearing about the things Jesus did in the last week of His life until we get to Good Friday when Jesus died on the Cross.

But that's not the end of the story.....because we know that on Easter Sunday Jesus overcame death and rose from the dead. That's why our crosses are bright green – green is the colour of life and a green cross shows that Jesus brought life back from the tomb.

LET'S PRAY

**Lord Jesus,
the people waved their palms at you
and a donkey carried you into Jerusalem.
We thank you that by your Holy Cross
you saved us all
and gave us life.
Amen.**

A HYMN FOR HOLY WEEK

My song is love unknown,
my saviour's love for me;
love to the loveless shown
that they might lovely be:
but who am I, that for my sake
my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

Sometimes they strew his way
and his sweet praises sing,
resounding all the day
hosannas to their king:
then 'crucify' is all their breath,
and for his death they thirst and cry.

Here might I stay and sing
of him my soul adores;
never was love, dear King,
never was grief like yours!
This is my friend in whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.

SENDING

Bless to us O God this day fresh made.
In the chorus of birds, bless us.
In the scent of blossom, bless us.
In the wet grass and the spring flowers bless us.

Bless us and heal us, for we come to you
in love and in trust.
We come to you in expectant hope.

May God keep us in all our days.
May Christ shield us in all our ways.
May the Spirit bring us healing and peace.
May God the Holy Trinity drive all darkness from us
and pour upon us blessing and light.

Amen.

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

*Some material from Times and Seasons, Copyright ©The Archbishop's Council, 2006
Other material from New Patterns for Worship, Copyright © The Archbishop's Council, 2002
Make Way! - Graham Kendrick, Copyright © 1986 Thankyou Music
My song is love unknown © Jubilate Hymns Ltd*