

## **2022 – 10<sup>TH</sup> APRIL – PALM SUNDAY – WORSHIP AT HOME**

Dear friends,

So Palm Sunday is with us! Time to look toward Easter – and also to the events leading up to it. Next week I hope to include words for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Saturday as well as for the glory of Easter Day itself. It is important to understand the darkness before responding to the light of Easter – it is only then that we can fully appreciate all that Jesus was willing to do for us. The Gospel accounts of Jesus approaching Jerusalem are strongly influenced by Psalm 118 – the psalm recited by pilgrims arriving in the city for the Passover Festival. Luke carefully subverts the tradition to show how Jesus was a very different kind of Messiah to the one the crowds were expecting.

Every blessing, *Margaret*.

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### **Call to worship:**

We look for an all-powerful king, but Jesus confidently comes among us as an ordinary commoner.

How extraordinary!

Are we *still* looking for God in the wrong places?

Wonderful God, thank you that you meet us right here where we are – in the ordinary stuff and activities of this day. As we journey through Holy Week, may we recognise you in Christ Jesus, be empowered to live like him – to live into the preciousness of the life that you sustain in us.

Living God, we bring you our ‘hosannas’ – for you are an almighty God.

We bring you our ‘alleluias’ because you are a wonderful God.

We bring you our dreams for you are a faithful God.

We bring you our discipleship for you are an encouraging God.

We bring you our hearts for you are a loving God in whom we can trust. **Amen.**

### **The words to ‘All glory, laud and honour’ written by St Theodulph of Orleans [d. 821] and translated by John Mason Neale [1811-1866]. Singing the Faith 262**

1 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 cometh, the King and Blessed One.

2 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.

3 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.

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

**Prayers:** Loving God, we join this day in glad and joyful praise. We welcome Christ once more as our King, Lord, and Saviour – we promise him our loyalty – we bring him our love – we bow to him in worship – we greet him with wonder.

Loving God, come to us again through Christ this day. Speak to us as we read familiar words – as we recall his triumphal entry into Jerusalem long ago and as we remember all that it meant and all that it cost. Help us to see that it was not only in the welcome of Palm Sunday, but in the rejection which followed that Jesus revealed your glory, and so help us to offer him our service in the days ahead, through the good times and the bad.

Hosanna to the Son of David, glory in the highest heaven, now and for evermore. **Amen.**

Lord Jesus Christ, we welcome and praise you this day - lifting up our voices in glad hosannas - joyfully acknowledging you as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Yet we know in our hearts, even as we greet you, sincere though we may be, that our worship and commitment is sometimes as weak and shallow as that which greeted you as you entered Jerusalem long ago.

Forgive us that we go on making the same mistakes made on that Palm Sunday.

We profess to follow you, but in our hearts we follow our own inclinations.

We are self-centred in our discipleship, looking as much for what we can receive as give.

We are preoccupied with appearances, our external show disguising an inner poverty which only you can see.

We are ready to serve when life is good, but rather more reluctant when it involves the way of sacrifice.

Lord Jesus Christ, you knew, as you entered Jerusalem, that the welcome of the crowd would turn to rejection – yet still you came and still you died for them.

We praise you for that truth, and we thank you that you still come to us, inviting us to respond and share in your kingdom.

Come again now into our hearts, cleansing us of all that is evil – all that is impure and unworthy – all that keeps us from you.

Come to your Church, filling it with love – harmony – humility, and faith.

Come to your world, blessing it with peace – justice – freedom, and hope.

Lord Jesus Christ, we welcome you today as the Prince of Peace – the King of kings – the Servant of all – the Lord of all – the all in all!

Son of David, have mercy upon us, for your name's sake. **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.**

### **Psalms 118: 1-2 and 119: 1-29. [The Message]**

Thank God because he is good, because his love never quits. Tell the world, Israel, 'His love never quits.' Swing wide the city gates – the righteous gates! I'll walk right through and thank God! The Temple Gate belongs to God, so the victors can enter and praise.

Thank you for responding to me; you've truly become my salvation!

The stone the masons discarded as flawed is now the capstone!

This is God's work. We rub our eyes – we can hardly believe it!

This is the very day God acted – let's celebrate and be festive! Salvation now, God, Salvation now! Oh, yes, God – a free and full life!

Blessed are you who enter in God's name – from God's house we bless you! God is God, he has bathed us in light. Festoon the shrine with garlands, hang coloured banners above the altar!

You're my God, and I thank you. O my God, I lift high your praise.

Thank God – he is so good. His love never quits!

**Comment:**

Psalm 118 was the one which everyone sang as they approached Jerusalem for the Passover festival. It became a psalm for pilgrims because of its references to the city gates – but it was written, originally, to celebrate military victories. The festal procession with branches was to celebrate the returning armies – ‘the one who comes in the name of the Lord’ [ here: Blessed are you who enter in God’s name] was the king or general who led them.

In the first century AD, with Israel under Roman occupation, the crowds had no victory to celebrate, but they sang the psalm anyway, partly to celebrate the steadfast love of God, and partly to express their longing for the Messiah – for a new Moses to liberate them – a new David to restore the nation’s fortunes. The psalm became a key text in the Early Church – one reason being that it pointed to the resurrection which we would find in verse 17: ‘I didn’t die. I *lived!* And now I’m telling the world what God did! Another reason was that it contained the enigmatic saying: ‘The stone the masons discarded as flawed is now the capstone!’ [later quoted in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7 as well as in the Gospels].

In its original setting the verse may have been written to celebrate the rebuilding of the Temple from the rubble left over when the previous Temple was destroyed. But the first Christians found in it a way to make sense of the cross. No-one had expected the Messiah to be crucified, but God had other plans.

As Peter tells the Jerusalem authorities [Acts 4: 8-11]: ‘Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.....this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders.’

**The words to ‘I will enter his gates’ written by Leona von Brethorst. Songs of Fellowship 268.**

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I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart,  
I will enter his courts with praise;  
I will say this is the day that the Lord has made,  
I will rejoice for he has made me glad.

He has made me glad; he has made me glad,  
I will rejoice for he has made me glad.  
He has made me glad; he has made me glad,  
I will rejoice for he has made me glad.

**Luke 19: 28-40: [The Message]:**

Jesus headed straight up to Jerusalem. When he got near Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olives, he sent off two of his disciples with instructions; “Go to the village across from you. As soon as you enter, you’ll find a colt tethered, one that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says anything or asks, ‘What are you doing?’ say, ‘His Master needs him.’”

The two left and found it just as he had said. As they were untying the colt, its owners said: ‘What are you doing untying the colt?’

They said: ‘His Master needs him.’

They brought the colt to Jesus. Then, throwing their coats on its back, they helped Jesus get on. As he rode, the people gave him a grand welcome, throwing their coats on the street.

Right at the crest, where Mount Olives begins its descent, the whole crowd of disciples burst into enthusiastic praise over all the mighty works they had witnessed.

‘Blessed is he who comes - the king in God’s name!

All’s well in heaven! Glory in the high places!’

Some Pharisees in the crowd told him: ‘Teacher, get your disciples under control!’

But he said, ‘If they kept quiet, the stones would do it for them, shouting praise.’

### **Comment:**

Luke's account of Jesus' approach to Jerusalem is laced with irony. This is not a victorious king returning to his city – nor, despite the hopes of the crowd, is this a Messiah who will lead an uprising against the Roman oppressors.

This is a man on a donkey – a man who has come to die. To make the point, Luke does not mention any palm branches being strewn on the roads – neither does he show the crowds acclaiming Jesus in the words of the psalm [118:26] but has just the disciples making the connection between that psalm and Jesus' entry. Though they sing from 118:38 'Blessed is the *king* who comes in the name of the Lord' tying in with the prophecy in Zephaniah 9:9 – 'Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey.'

Yet this *is* a king and a kingdom that shatter conventional expectations. Again, we are in the upside-down world of the Magnificat, where the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the lowly are exalted [Luke 1:52].

Luke adds a footnote to the story, in which the Pharisees ask Jesus to restrain the disciples. Presumably they feared that the Romans would see what was happening as a revolution in the making and respond, brutally repressing all expressions of Jewish faith across the board. Jesus dismisses their objections. Even if the disciples fell silent, 'the stones would shout out'[v. 40]. This image comes from Habakkuk 2:11 where the walls of Jerusalem cry out against the injustices and corruption of the city, none of which have been challenged by the leaders of the city.

This is the Pharisees' final appearance in this Gospel. Inside the city, the Temple authorities have the final say on matters of faith, and from this point in the story they become Jesus' main adversaries.

### **MEDITATION OF SIMON THE ZEALOT: *see John 12: 12-13.***

I think they've got it – finally understood who Jesus is, for look at the welcome they're giving him - the joy in their faces, laughter in their eyes.

They're tearing down the palm branches in their excitement, shouting themselves hoarse. 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'

They surely realise at last that he is the Messiah, the one sent by God to redeem his people.

Or do they?

For what is it they're calling him now: the King of Israel. Now that would have been music to my ears not so long ago, for it's what I longed to see: a ruler coming to drive out the Romans – to restore our earthly fortunes – to establish a new era of plenty and prosperity with our people at the centre – and God's kingdom here on earth.

But, having walked and talked with Jesus – having heard his message and seen the difference he alone can bring, I realise now that what we need is a change not to the regime or system, but to people's lives – to who and what we are.

That is where he wants to reign: in human hearts rather than on an earthly throne.

Have they understood that? Have *any* of us?

They're welcoming him with open arms, proclaiming their devotion – but if he fails to deliver what they want will their commitment hold – their allegiance stay true?

Will they still salute him as king if his kingdom's not in this world?

Time, I suppose, will tell.

### **PRAYERS**

Lord Jesus Christ, teach us what it means to honour you – to enthrone you in our lives. Help us to understand that true commitment involves more than declaring our loyalty, however sincere that may be – more than homage offered with our lips, however eloquent it may sound.

Teach us to acclaim you from the heart with lives consecrated to your service, seeking your will, and walking your way, so that we may truly acknowledge you as Lord, and work meaningfully for the growth of your kingdom, on earth as in heaven. **Amen.**

Lord Jesus Christ, you came not as a king mighty in battle, but as the Prince of Peace, the promised deliverer, sent to heal and restore our broken world. Now we pray for peace and unity between nations. We thank you that there are efforts made to make this world a more peaceful place and pray that you will prosper all such efforts, granting that a spirit of trust and co-operation may develop among them. We pray for the places where tension still continues – especially now we think of the Ukraine fighting to retain their own country. Lord, where there is still hatred, division, violence, and slaughter and where there are people caught up in the awfulness of war, bring your peace. We pray for all those who are maimed and injured – those who have lost loved ones – those for whom life will never be the same again. Break down the barriers which keep people apart – the prejudice and intolerance, greed and envy, injustice and exploitation which continue to scar our world. May your Spirit of love overcome all that causes people to take up arms against one another.

Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, come again to our world and bring the unity that you alone can bring. May the day come when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears turned into pruning hooks; when nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither learn war anymore; a day when no-one will hurt or destroy.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, for your name's sake. **Amen.**

**The words to 'Ride on, ride on in majesty' written by Henry Hart Milman [1791-1868] StF 265**

1 Ride on, ride on in majesty! Hark, all the tribes 'Hosanna!' cry;

Your humble beast pursues its road with palms and scattered garments strowed.

2 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.

3 Ride on, ride on in majesty! The winged squadrons of the sky

Look down with sad and wondering eyes to see the approaching sacrifice.

4 Ride on, ride on in majesty! Your last and fiercest strife is nigh;

The Father on his sapphire throne, expects his own anointed Son.

5 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.

**Closing Prayer:**

May God grant you the exuberance of the Palm Sunday crowds - and the humility of Jesus riding on a donkey.

May he grant you the energy and excitement of the crowd - and the calm holiness of Jesus.

May he grant you the expectation of the crowd – and the understanding heart of Jesus who journeyed to Jerusalem for the love of us all. **Amen.**