

Dear friends,

This week's offering comes with two distinct parts. The first concentrates on Palm Sunday itself while the second part looks at the week ahead – at Holy Week. Jesus enters Jerusalem as a Passover pilgrim for the last time, demonstrating how he brings in God's kingdom, and setting the stage for the showdown with those he sees as God's real enemies. As we focus on Jesus entering Jerusalem, less than a week before his journey to the cross, we explore the reaction of a crowd who seem to be carried away in acts of praise. Every blessing, Margaret.

Call to worship.

Let us come before the Lord today, lifting our hearts in praise.

May we be ready to follow him with 'Hosanna!' on our lips and love for him in our hearts.

Heavenly Father, help us to recognise Jesus as the one who comes in your name – as the one who blesses us and saves us. As we explore your Word may we offer true praise and adoration in our worship – may we be open to learn more about your ways – and may we resolve to walk the road with Jesus every day.

Today we meet to remember that triumphal journey into Jerusalem. People all around the world will be gathering to do the same.

The whole city was stirred, and came together to bless God. We long for our cities, towns and villages to unite in similar fashion.

The whole city took part in the celebrations, improvising as they went, cutting palms and spreading cloaks.

May we be open to share what our Lord needs from us, to celebrate as a gathered community.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

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.

Prayers including Lord's Prayer.

We praise you, Lord, that you travelled the road leading to your death, not with armies but gently, riding on a donkey. We thank you that, wherever you call us to travel, into whatever situation, we too can go gently. Surrounded by your love and your community, we shall go on into the week ahead in your name, singing 'Hosanna in the highest heaven.'

We are sorry for all the times when we do not acknowledge Jesus as our King.

Lord, we confess that we lead such busy lives, it can be easy to shut you out. For the times that we chase material things rather than seek you, we ask you to forgive us.

For the times we choose only to follow the bits of you we like, we ask you to forgive us.

For the times of sorrow or hardship when we struggle to see you, we ask you to forgive us.

You are our King, Lord, and we will follow you. Amen.

Lord Jesus, on Palm Sunday your followers wanted to pave your way. They used their cloaks and branches. Thank you for paving our way to God by being willing to follow the route to the cross. Let us never ever take that lightly. Make us also ready to pave the way for others in their search of you. Amen.

Lord, I wonder how you felt when you saw all the cloaks and branches laid out for you. What a sight it must have been – a pathway truly fit for a king.

Would I be prepared to lay my coat on the road for a donkey to walk on?

Lord, what would you have me do today to honour you? Amen.

Our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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.

Matthew 21: 1-11:

As they 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 at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them straight away.'

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

The disciples went and did as Jesus instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 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 heaven!*'

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.'

Comment: This reading is full of excitement – there is a sense that history is being made – that the purposes of God become clear to the crowd at a particular time and place and in a particular social context. The eternal touches time, and the people respond with joy and worship. Underpinning the recognition that God is at work is the rich heritage the people would have had in the stories and prophecies which inform their hope. When the people realise that they are seeing the Messiah enter Jerusalem, they respond with words from psalm 118: 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'

Meditation of one of the crowd in Jerusalem: [Nick Fawcett – A Most Amazing Man year A]

You should have seen the crowd that day! All round him they were – rushing ahead, pushing behind – a seething mass surging through the city gates, shouting themselves hoarse. They were ecstatic, waving palm branches in welcome and lining the way with their coats. 'Hosanna!' they cried. @Hosanna to the son of David!', 'Blessed be the Lord!'

And the one at their *centre*? A guy called Jesus apparently, from up north in galilee. The name rang a bell, for I'd heard tales of signs and wonders, of a man who healed the sick, fed the multitude, stilled the storm – a prophet like none other, according to some.

But you could have fooled me, for I saw nothing special about him, nothing to catch the eye – just an ordinary person, like you and me. Yet still they cheered, still they chanted, as though he were the Messiah himself, the Son of God, a conquering king. It's a puzzle for I'd have expected a fanfare of trumpets were he that – a chariot of gold and royal procession – not a man riding on a *donkey*, but he must have

something about him to cause such a stir – some gift to win hearts and capture minds. I’m not sure what – not sure how – but I mean to find out, for it’s intriguing, isn’t it? Too intriguing to ignore.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, save us from confusing the values of this world with your own, from seeing your heavenly rule as one which forces itself on people, demanding, coercing, imposing.

Teach us that, instead, yours is the way of love, inviting a response – surrendering, liberating, serving.

Help us to deny ourselves in order to discover who we really are – to be last so as to be first – to lose our life in order to find it – to walk the royal way of the cross. Amen.

Lord Jesus, we pray for all who give of themselves sacrificially – for those who are dedicated to serving others, and we thank you that there are so many who serve, and who care for others quietly and lovingly. We pray for those who are serving in war-torn countries across the world – the medics, those who work in missions, the media, charities and more. Those who bring food, shelter, and healing to those in need, sometimes putting their life on the line. We cannot be there, Lord, but help us to give as much as we can to help those who can.

We pray for those people in our communities who need our unconditional love – maybe hurting from broken relationships, abuse, bullying, domestic violence.... We pray for all children and adults whose lives are bereft of hope and love.

We pray that we might be Easter people, laying down our lives to serve others, bringing hope to hopeless situations – the hope of the cross and resurrection.

Let us travel together and lighten the load. Amen.

The words to ‘Listening God’ written by Marjorie Dobson [b. 1940] Singing the Faith 524

This is sung to Noel Nouvelet, the tune used for ‘Jesus Christ is waiting’ [StF 251] & ‘Now the green blade rises’ [StF 306].

1 Listening God, you hear us when we cannot speak, when despair and turmoil leave us faint and weak.
In love you call us back to you again and your grace reminds us how you feel our pain.

2 Searching God, you find us when we go astray, as self-centred living takes us from your way.
In love you seek us, show us what we’ve lost, and your tears remind us what forgiveness cost.

3 Suffering God, you lift us from our deepest grief, when emotion blinds us to our own belief.
In love you touch us with your nail-torn hand and your wounds remind us why you understand.

4 Risen God, you show us love too strong for death, evil deeds defeated by your living breath.
In love you teach us never to despair, your new life reminds us, hope is always there.

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And then things changed. As the week progressed things became worse and worse – everything turned against Jesus.

After the Last Supper which Jesus had had with his disciples and he knew that Judas was going to betray him, Jesus was very unhappy. He knew that he was soon going to die. The people who hated him were plotting to get rid of him. He trusted his Father God to work things out, but Jesus knew that it was going to be very frightening and very painful along the way. He got up from the table, and disciples rose with him. He led them to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Thomas was very worried – he saw how low and how deep in thought Jesus was and had the feeling that something dreadful was going to happen. Other disciples probably thought that nothing really bad would come to pass – that God would not let any harm come to Jesus. Perhaps Thomas felt that, while he trusted God, things were not going to work out simply.

When they arrived in the garden, the disciples suddenly realised just how deeply sad Jesus looked and became concerned themselves. Then Jesus asked Peter, James and John to go with him deeper into the garden, while the others stayed where they were.

Jesus led his friends a little further on, then he told them that this was a very difficult time for him, and he asked them to sit and watch with him. He went on just a little further and prostrated himself on the ground to pray.

‘Father, this is awful – isn’t there some way I can avoid what’s going to happen? But, Father, it is your will which matters, so I will go through this if I must.’

He got up and went back to his three friends – but they had fallen asleep.

‘Imagine how Jesus must have felt. ‘Oh, couldn’t you stay awake with me for an hour to pray with me?

Now, please, stay awake – pray that you will not have to go through what is going to happen to me. I know you mean well, but you are just not strong enough to cope with it.

As Jesus went back to where he had prayed, the disciples must have been bewildered. What was all that about? They probably wanted to go back home to safety.

It was indeed a dark night, with the moonlight casting sinister shadows among the trees – but that would have been as nothing compared with the fear that Jesus was feeling as he lay face down on the ground again to pray to God his Father.

‘It is not that I don’t trust you, Father, but this is such a terrible thing which I am going to have to bear, and I really wish there was another way. But, Father, it is your will which matters, not mine.’

When Jesus went back to the others, he found them fast asleep and dead to the world. This time, Jesus didn’t wake them, but returned to pray again. The silence must have been frightening. He prayed harder than ever before – but there seemed to be no answer – just an awesome silence. It was as if all creation was holding its breath to see what he would do.

Jesus knew what he had to do – but that didn’t make it easy. It must have seemed like hours to him as he prayed and prayed – but still there was just the horrible silence of the night. At last, he got up and went back to the others, who were still sleeping.

He said to them: ‘time to wake up. This is it – I have to do what God sent me to do. And look – they have come to get me.’

Suddenly the garden was full of people with swords and sticks, all looking for Jesus. Judas stepped up to him and kissed him.

Jesus faced up to the soldiers calmly. ‘I am the one whom you want. Let my friends go.’

Peter wanted to make a fight of it, and pulled out a sword, but Jesus stopped him.

‘I have preached love and non-violence all my ministry. I am not going to throw all that away just to save my own skin.’

So Jesus was captured and led away, and his friends turned and ran.

Jesus had made his choice. He stayed true to God – and true to his own faith.

Even as they nailed him to the cross, he prayed for them and kept on trusting God.

When he died some people thought it was all over – but it wasn’t for he had won the battle. He had kept faith with God even when everything seemed hopeless.

And now God was going to keep faith with him – soon he would be raised to wonderful new life. But that is the story for next week.

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If you can, read the story of Holy Week from the Gospels, so that you are ready for the victory of Easter. We need to tread the deepest lows with Jesus in order to truly be able to celebrate his resurrection.

Matthew: Chapters 26 – 28

Mark: Chapters 14 -15

Luke: Chapters 22 – 23

John: Chapters 18-19

Each of the Gospels tells the main story but brings in different aspects also. It is fascinating to read all four if you can.

The words to: 'When I survey the wondrous cross' written by Isaac Watts [1674-1748] StF 287

1 When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

3 See from his head, his hands, his feet sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4 His dying crimson, like a robe, spreads o'er his body on the tree;
then am I dead to all the globe, and all the globe is dead to me.

5 Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Closing Prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ,

You lived for others

You died for others –

And you rose for all.

Help us to live in turn as your people, seeking to serve rather than be served,

To give rather than to receive.

Teach us to reach out in love and so to make real your compassion and represent your body here on earth.

You came as the man for others, come again to our world.

Hear us – cleanse us – renew us, for it is in your name we pray. Amen.