

Palm Sunday 2020 The Barn



Our worship together is in the name of the + Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

**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!**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, during Lent we have been preparing by works of love and self-sacrifice for the celebration of our Lord's death and resurrection. Today we come together to begin this solemn 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.

Let us pray: 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

Jesus said, 'Before you offer your gift, go and be reconciled.'
As sisters and brothers in God's family, we ask our Father for forgiveness.

**Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly, love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Matthew 21: 1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ "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.'"

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ 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!"
¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Let us pray: True and humble king, hailed by the crowd as Messiah: grant us the faith to know you and love you, that we may be found beside you on the way of the cross, which is the path of glory. **Amen**

I haven't preached a sermon on Palm Sunday for over 15 years. It has been our tradition to gather together at one of our churches, to receive our palms together, to listen to the first half of the Passion Narrative, and then to walk together to the other church to listen to the second half of the Passion Narrative. Prayer, not a sermon, always followed that reading, but not today, for we are into the third week of lock down due to the Covid 19 measures, our churches are locked for the second Sunday in a row, and we would not be allowed to congregate and process, even if we wanted to. So you get a sermon instead.

However, in the growing tradition of these troubled times, the sermon starts with a picture, or in today's case, two. At the head of the piece there are two photos of a basket of palm crosses, one on the altar, the other in the porch. These are the palms we had prepared for today's service: they have been blessed, and will be kept in church until the day we are allowed back in. The first thing you will receive on that glorious day will be your palm cross. Junior Church will make their own palm crosses together as they meet virtually across the ether this morning. There are instructions on the website for making your own palm cross, if you can't join the children in their session. We will do what we can to mark this extraordinary day in our calendar, and look forward to the day when we can bring it all together, in church.

The events of Palm Sunday do not happen on a whim. This is a very carefully choreographed piece of political and Messianic theatre. The number of nods and winks that conspire together to drive the scene is remarkable. Jesus and his disciples have been preparing for this moment for a long time. In a deliberate public act of fulfilment of prophecy, Jesus claims his title as King and Messiah, and rides into his capital city to claim his rightful place. He does not head for the seat of government, however, but to the Temple, for that is where his kingdom will be proclaimed. He is a king who comes in humility, not in might. He is a king who is celebrated by pilgrims from around the land of Israel, not by the political elite. He is a king who unites throne and altar in one person, bringing together the two distinct lines of Melchizedek and David in himself. But his throne will be a cross, and his altar will be a table with broken bread and poured-out wine.

This deliberate act of confrontation and self-declaration sets the stage for the events of the coming week. Arguments will rage in the Temple precincts between Jesus and the Sadducees, Jesus and the Pharisees, and eventually between Jesus and the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jewish nation. Plots will be hatched, traitors will be bribed, dark forces summoned to do away with this king. While that goes

on, Jesus will teach his disciples about the radical nature of their God, who provides equally for all who labour, whether all day or just one hour. Jesus will call his disciples to be ready, as bridesmaids with flasks of oil, in case the bridegroom is delayed. And Jesus will call his disciples to one last celebration of the liberation of Israel from Egypt, as he recasts Passover into the Eucharist. Everything is being turned on its head, and Jesus is orchestrating every move.

How does this sit with the image of Jesus as a king, “humble and mounted on a donkey”. Surely humble kings do not draw attention to themselves, nor parade in public, seeking confrontation. But this king does. The humility of Christ is not a self-effacing humility. It is divine love, visible in a human being. This humility is God in human form. Christ could have revealed himself in glory, as he did to three of his disciples on the mount of Transfiguration, but he does not do that here. He would have wowed the crowds, but that is not his approach as he enters Jerusalem. Instead, the crowds and the religious leaders see Jesus the man, fulfilling Scripture, speaking the truth with grace and clarity, challenging Israel to its very soul.

We are called to follow in the footsteps of this humble king. We are called to show our utter humanity, redeemed by divine love. We do this today by staying at home and by observing social distancing on our sole foray outside. We cannot claim to ourselves any particular grace as Christians that differentiates us from the rest of the world. We are just as human as everyone else, and for that reason our church buildings are closed. But we are still in the world, we can still communicate with others, we can still bear other people’s burdens, we can care, wherever we are. Christ, the humble king, can shine through our words and deeds even in lockdown. Our home-made palm crosses will spur us to love, as Christ loved us. Our home-made worship will lead us to pray for our stricken world. Our home-made community of grace will enable us to persevere, whatever the outcome.

Our God confronts the evils of this world head-on. Our God does not flinch from difficult decisions. Our God takes grace and mercy into the worst human situation, and redeems it. We are his followers, we are his agents now, here in Kew. May we rejoice in Christ’s humble kingship, and live as children of light, however dark our world may become. And may we encourage one another, stay in contact with each other, pray for everyone we know, every day, so that Christ’s love and compassion will bring us peace and hope, with rejoicing. Amen

Fr Peter 4.4.2020

Mary Noyes has posted three Palm Sunday songs on the parish websites. Sing with her today, as well as reading and listening.

Richard Austen has posted prayers for today on the parish websites. Pray with him, as well as reading and listening.

Beverley Hart has posted activities for young and old on the parish websites today. Work together with her to add colour and shape to your Palm Sunday.

Let us pray: May the Father, who so loved the world that he gave his only Son, bring you joy by faith in his eternal life. **Amen**

May Christ, who accepted the cup of sacrifice in obedience to the Father’s will, keep you steadfast as you walk with him the way of his cross. **Amen**

May the Spirit, who strengthens us to suffer with Christ that we may share his glory, set your minds on life and peace. **Amen**

And the + blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you and those you love, this Palm Sunday and always. **Amen**

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord! **In the name of Christ. Amen**