

Morning Worship Service
Sunday 28th March 2021
Palm Sunday 2021

Introduction

We have come to the city of the living God,
to the heavenly Jerusalem,
with thousands of angels in joyful assembly.

Alleluia

We have come to God the judge of all,
to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.

Alleluia

SONG

Together we pray:

Lord, direct our thoughts,
teach us to pray,
lift up our hearts to worship you
in Spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Confession

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.
Though we have grieved him, yet he will heal us if we confess our sins in penitence
and faith.

Together we confess our sins to Almighty God:

God our Father, we come to you in sorrow for our sins:
For turning away from you and ignoring your will for our lives:
For behaving just as we wish, without thinking of you:
For failing you by what we do, think and say:
For letting ourselves be drawn away from you by temptations in the world around us:
For living as if we were ashamed to belong to your Son:
Father, forgive us, save us and help us. Amen.

Absolution

May God who is both power and love,
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.

Collect

Reading

Mark 11: 1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve

Sermon

Today is Palm Sunday – the day when, if we’d been able to meet in church, we would have received a Palm Cross. Sadly, we can’t meet this week - but we can next week so my plan is to have the crosses available then should you like to have one.

Palm Sunday begins the week when Jesus will be crucified, called, in our Christian calendar, Holy Week: but the week was already a very important one in the Jewish calendar because the great Passover Festival was about to begin. God himself had ordained this week-long celebration period to ensure that the Jews remembered their momentous Exodus from captivity in Egypt, which had occurred roughly 1450ish years before Jesus was born.

That event was a huge procession of people – about six hundred thousand men on foot besides women and children; and I’m guessing that, while they were probably somewhat anxious, they would also have been in a celebratory mood – after all they had been captives in Egypt for 430 years and here they were gaining their freedom at last!

The Bible tells us about other processions.

A notable one is when the famous King David rescues the precious Ark of the Covenant which had fallen into the hands of their enemies, the Philistines.

We’re told in 2 Samuel 6 that, after they’d rescued the Ark, David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord as they carried the Ark home in a triumphant procession. There were songs, musical instruments playing, and King David set the example in praising the Lord by leaping and dancing along with everyone else. He was a mighty warrior and rescuer from enemies!

This first Palm Sunday there was a procession too. Jews would have come to Jerusalem from all over the Roman world, so the place would have been packed. Many in the crowds had heard of or seen Jesus and they were hoping for great things from him. They were hoping he'd bring freedom from the Romans just like the warring King David brought them freedom from their enemies all those years ago.

But Jesus, while he was definitely fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, was not fulfilling it in the way the people thought he would, or indeed should! Jesus was no warring King, gallantly astride a huge horse or riding in a chariot: no, he came as a gentle and peaceable King riding on a donkey's colt, fulfilling the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. 'Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

Many people would have known that he was fulfilling this prophecy, but the people hadn't cottoned onto what it meant.

So, we have this joyous procession heading into Jerusalem. The reading tells us that many spread their cloaks on the road for him to walk on – a bit like a red carpet (they knew Jesus was someone important) – or they cut palm branches and laid them down. Scripture doesn't say that they waved them but I'm sure they did.

Then there was the shouting from those ahead and those behind. Hosanna! Hosanna means Save. They thought that Jesus was going to save them; and they were right, but they hadn't cottoned on to how he was going to save them.

They also referred to David's kingdom because of a prophecy found in 2 Samuel 7 referring to an offspring of King David being raised up and establishing a kingdom: but they hadn't cottoned on to the sort of kingdom he was bringing about. Sadly, as we know but they didn't, this same crowd would be baying for Jesus' blood by the end of the week. Crucify him they'd be shouting instead.

However, today we focus on that joyous procession when the crowd felt jubilant. I wonder if any of you have ever been in a procession. I remember when some of us still here in St James were more than a few years younger than we are now, joined processions, both in Birmingham and London, to declare our faith in Jesus. They were joyful occasions and seem in the distant past now.

But if we look in 2 Corinthians 2, we will find that Scripture tells us that we are always in a procession. Verse 14 says 'But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ.'

If we belong to Jesus, we are in his triumphal procession right now, in his victory parade, making our way to heaven to be with him.

For Jesus that first Palm Sunday's joyful procession led him to the cross and death so that, after his resurrection, anyone could join this wondrous cavalcade in the here and now wherever they are born in history.

For Jesus there was complete knowledge of what would be waiting for him at the very end of that first Palm Sunday's joyful procession - resurrection into glory - but before he arrived there, he knew he would undergo agonising pain and death.

We too can bask in the assurance that, when we belong to Jesus, waiting at the end of our life's procession is also glorious resurrection and eternal communion with him.

We don't know specific details like Jesus did, but we do know that there will be pain, sometimes agonising pain, and hurt and sorrow and disappointment and 'horrible stuff' along the way.

However we don't need to despair because Jesus has had real experience of all that 'horrible stuff' and so he understands how we may struggle to keep going along our way in the triumphal procession.....but he walks with us and gives us encouragement and strength to carry on through it all to reach the resurrection crown of glory waiting for us on the other side of death – just as he persevered he enables us to.

Today, as we remember Jesus riding willingly on that lowly donkey on his way to certain preordained death but knowing what was to come afterwards, may we confidently walk in his triumphal procession today with our fellow Christians all over the world knowing that the final end will be glorious for us too!

Creed

We believe and trust in God the Father, who made all things. We believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ, who redeemed the world. We believe and trust in his Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God. This is the faith of the Church. This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intercessions

for Palm Sunday 2021

Lord Jesus, as we remember today your procession into Jerusalem and your determination to be fully obedient in going through the suffering of the cross, we ask you to look with compassion on those churches around the world where worshipping you brings daily suffering and persecution from the authorities of the land. Give them the courage and strength to stay following you wherever you lead them, regardless of any opposition. In our country your Church is cushioned from so much of that type of oppression but, nonetheless, may we doggedly follow your call and direction, regardless of any scorn or rejection directed towards us.

May we be obedient in all things, easy or difficult, with the one aim of glorifying you through them.

Lord Jesus, on earth you were the example of servant king. We pray for all governments, nation and local, that they will wake up to the fact that they are in the place of power to serve the people, not to acquire personal, material gain or special status.

Where there is corruption, bring your honesty; where there is discord and dissent, bring your unity; where there is blatant waste of finances, bring your good stewardship; where there is disarray and confusion, bring your wisdom and clarity.

Raise up into these key places of power more and more people who follow you and have a heart for selflessly ensuring that the poor, the weak, the vulnerable and the marginalised get a fair deal in all things.

Lord Jesus, we pray for your blessing on our community. In this last week at school before the children break up for the Easter holidays, we ask that our St James school will be a haven of peace. We pray that the Easter Story will be truthfully and faithfully shared with the children. We pray that parents who can sometimes be challenging will feel the infusion of your love for them and your goodness to them.

And we ask particularly that after Easter, when more activities start up again, your protection will surround our area to ensure good health and safety.

Lord Jesus, our suffering servant, we name before you those we know who are in physical pain, living with an incurable disease, battling through mental anguish, lost in the midst of grief.....May they know the power of your love supporting them, your presence walking alongside them, and your Holy Spirit hope for the future.

Let us continue in prayer saying together the words our Saviour taught us:

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.

SONG

Blessing

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.