



28th March 2021 - Palm Sunday

The Gathering

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.

The Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you
and also with you.

Song: All glory, laud, and honour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBfJyjDolwA>

Prayers of Penitence

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart God will not despise.
Let us come to the Lord, who is full of compassion,
and acknowledge our transgressions in penitence and faith.

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:
fill us with your Spirit.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:
fill us with your Spirit.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:
fill us with your Spirit.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

The Lord enrich us with his grace,
and nourish us with his blessing;
the Lord defend us in trouble and keep us from all evil;

the Lord accept our prayers,
and absolve us from our offences,
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Amen.

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh
and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

Isaiah 50:4-9a

⁴ The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary.

He wakens me morning by morning,
wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.

⁵ The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears;
I have not been rebellious,
I have not turned away.

⁶ I offered my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;
I did not hide my face
from mocking and spitting.

⁷ Because the Sovereign LORD helps me,
I will not be disgraced.

Therefore have I set my face like flint,
and I know I will not be put to shame.

⁸ He who vindicates me is near.
Who then will bring charges against me?
Let us face each other!

Who is my accuser?
Let him confront me!

⁹ It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me.
Who will condemn me?

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 31:9-16

⁹ Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,

my soul and body with grief.
¹⁰ My life is consumed by anguish
and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction,
and my bones grow weak.
¹¹ Because of all my enemies,
I am the utter contempt of my neighbours
and an object of dread to my closest friends –
those who see me on the street flee from me.
¹² I am forgotten as though I were dead;
I have become like broken pottery.
¹³ For I hear many whispering,
'Terror on every side!'
They conspire against me
and plot to take my life.
¹⁴ But I trust in you, LORD;
I say, 'You are my God.'
¹⁵ My times are in your hands;
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,
from those who pursue me.
¹⁶ Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love.
This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross!
⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Song: Hosanna, hosanna

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAiBntMtViY>

Gospel Reading

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

Mark 11:1-11

11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone asks you, “Why are you doing this?” say, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.”’

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, ‘What are you doing, untying that colt?’ ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ 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!’

¹⁰ ‘Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!’

‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

¹¹ 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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

The Passion Read – Mark 15

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

² ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate.

‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied.

³ The chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ So again Pilate asked him, ‘Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.’

⁵ But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

⁹ ‘Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to get Pilate to release Barabbas instead.

¹² ‘What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?’ Pilate asked them.

¹³ ‘Crucify him!’ they shouted.

¹⁴ ‘Why? What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’

¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spat on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. ²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means 'the place of the skull'). ²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!' ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

³³ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, '*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.'

³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down,' he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

³⁸ The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

⁴² It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Sermon

Harold Wilson once observed that a week is a long time in politics. That is undoubtedly true, and it is equally true for the week in our Lord's life which followed the events we commemorate today on the Sunday we know as Palm Sunday. Of course, it is only John who makes mention of palm leaves – Mark makes do with branches cut from local fields and cloaks. If we had to cut down our neighbour's trees, and burn our own clothes, in order re-enact this triumphal entry, and to make ash for the following years Ash Wednesday service, I am sure there would be a less than favourable reaction.

People might even get a bit grumpy.

So, we make do with palm leaves which get blessed – that is set aside for a special purpose (they do not become magical objects possessing other-worldly powers, of course) and then either serve as bookmarks, occupants of pen-pots, clutters of mantelpieces or act as swords in the hands of juveniles until some are burnt the following year for Ash Wednesday. Unless your vicar does what I do, which is purchase a pot of palm ash from a church supplier! The rigmarole of burning palm crosses can be trying.....

For those in church today the service looks fairly different. Our service is basically split into two parts: the first being called, at least in Times and Seasons, 'The Liturgy of the Palms' and the second being entitled 'The Liturgy of the Passion'. Within the order of service there is no creed (although please note that the reading from Philippians is regarded as the earliest recorded creedal statement) nor, indeed, a formal confession.

Because we have this division, we have two gospel readings, both from Mark. The first, from chapter 11, is an account of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem and is read prior to the traditional blessing of the palms and procession. We can do the former, but the latter is problematic if we are to maintain a degree of covid compliance! The second is a complete reading of chapter 15, Mark's account of our Lord's trial, crucifixion, and death.

In passing, I think it's important that we hear that account in full. If one only attended church on a Sunday it would be perfectly possible to hear the Palm Sunday reading, with its association with excitement and celebration, and then come the following Sunday for the celebration that is Easter, and not engage with the pain of the Friday at all.

Now there is much to be said about our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, and the references back to events in the Hebrew Bible and inherited tradition which really give the heads up that the messiah Jesus came as was different to that expected, perhaps, by the majority. However, we have thought about that in previous years, and will undoubtedly return to it.

Instead, let's think about something a bit different, which is helped by having these two gospel readings together.

Charles Dickens had his Tale of Two Cities; Mark has his Tale of Two Crowds.

The first crowd makes its appearance just before our reading from chapter 11. It appears in chapter 10 verse 46 as Jesus leaves the city of Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd. Now we quite often read of crowds following Jesus, but it is this crowd which witnesses the healing of the blind beggar Bartimaeus, who then joins in with that crowd and journeys towards Jerusalem. We do not know how much of this crowd had witnessed other parts of Jesus' ministry, but clearly it grew on the journey to Jerusalem. And it is this crowd, possibly swelled by city dwellers coming out to see what all the fuss was about, which threw their cloaks on the floor and cut branches from trees to line the road as Jesus approached Jerusalem. They completely misunderstood the message Jesus was giving them; the use of cloaks and branches suggest welcoming a conquering hero and political independence and the adoption of a psalm associated with the dominion of David speak to that. Nevertheless, this was, if you like, a crowd of Galileans, who are accompanying Jesus and his disciples to Jerusalem for the festival. Following the events they had witnessed they were already predisposed towards Jesus, probably associating themselves with Bartimaeus' description of Jesus as being the Son of David with all its messianic associations.

One then has the events of the following week building towards chapter 15. And in chapter 15 we encounter an entirely different crowd. This was the crowd which came to demand Pilate follow the custom to release a prisoner held by the Roman authorities. It is highly improbable that this crowd, and it need not have been a very big one, contained any of our Galilean pilgrims nor that they were representative of the Jerusalem population as a whole. Whilst it is, of course, perfectly possible that they had been recruited by the chief priests to lobby for Barabbas, if they could have anticipated Pilate's offer of a prisoner release, the text certainly makes it clear that they were influenced by those priests. Pilate offers to release Jesus to them but, at the behest and incitement of others, the crowd demands the release of Barabbas instead. And it is then this crowd which demands, twice, that Pilate should crucify Jesus.

One of the great stains upon the church, and indeed upon what one might idealistically call 'Western civilisation', is the association which has been made of this 'crowd' with the whole Jewish community. They were not representative of the whole. The lie that they were lies at the heart of so much of the anti-Semitism that we have seen historically and, indeed, which extends into the present. At the very best this crowd were a vocal minority, stirred up by a group of community leaders, who with Roman – and hence Gentile – collusion, saw that Jesus was crucified.

The point is, these are two, distinct, crowds. As RT Francis observes: 'There is no warrant here for the preacher's favourite comment on the fickleness of a crowd that could shout 'Hosanna' one day and 'Crucify him' a few days later. They are not the same crowd. The Galilean pilgrims shouted 'Hosanna' as they approached the city; the Jerusalem crowd shouted, 'Crucify him'.

Why do I labour this point? Firstly because, in the past, I have been guilty of treating those two crowds as one. Secondly, because I know that people continue to make those associations – they are quite deeply rooted. It is not because of malice or ignorance that those associations are made, but it is because of preaching or accounts they have heard. In fact, I don't think I've ever heard a sermon which addresses the issue. And finally because it reinforces the need for us to be careful and attentive in the way we read and study scripture.

The first crowd undoubtedly missed the subliminal message Jesus was giving about the nature of his messiahship. I have no doubt that there were some who were really disgruntled about that as the truth of that messiahship played itself out. Perhaps one of the lessons we can draw from that is that we should be careful that we seek to follow the direction God is calling us in, not to try and shape God's calling to our own agenda.

As for the second crowd, whose familiarity with the Jesus story would have been very different to the Galilean crowd, there is the warning that it is very easy to manipulate people, especially in the short-term. But, of course, that is an historical problem; no one would try manipulating a group of people, on either a small or large scale, these days - we're all far too sophisticated to fall for that!!

Affirmation of Faith

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

We stand with Christ in his suffering.

For forgiveness for the many times we have denied Jesus,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For grace to seek out those habits of sin which mean
spiritual death,
and by prayer and self-discipline to overcome them,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For Christian people,
that through the suffering of disunity
there may grow a rich union in Christ,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who make laws, interpret them, and administer them,
that our common life may be ordered in justice and mercy,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who still make Jerusalem a battleground,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who have the courage and honesty to work openly for justice and peace,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those in the darkness and agony of isolation,
that they may find support and encouragement,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who, weighed down with hardship, failure, or sorrow, feel that God is far from them,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who are tempted to give up the way of the cross,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

That we, with those who have died in faith,
may find mercy in the day of Christ,
let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

**Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy upon us.**

The Peace

Once we were far off,
but now in union with Christ Jesus we have been brought near
through the shedding of Christ's blood,
for he is our peace.

May the peace of the Lord be always with us and all those we love.

Song: Make way, make way

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNDCyAB1Mvs>

An act of Spiritual Communion

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.

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day.
Amen.

Lord, in these days of mercy,
make us quiet and prayerful;
in these days of challenge,
make us stronger in you;
in these days of emptiness,
take possession of us;
in these days of waiting,
open our hearts to the mystery of your cross.

May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water
welling up to eternal life,
perfect in you the image of his glory;
and the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

Song: Come people of the risen king
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j07fbld3uY>

The Dismissal

To God the Father, who loved us,
and made us accepted in the Beloved:
to God the Son, who loved us,
and loosed us from our sins by his own blood:
to God the Holy Spirit,
who spreads the love of God abroad in our hearts:
to the one true God be all love and all glory
for time and for eternity.
Amen.

The Blessing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUYjP4V5SjC>