

Sheffield United Reformed Churches -Team Worship
Palm Sunday 4th April 2020 at 10:30 am (6th in Lent)

Call to Worship

Today is about a celebration, or is it? As we experience again the thrill of Jesus arriving in Jerusalem and the events which will lead to his death, we ask ourselves, what is this day all about? There is a lot of noise and excitement as Jesus enters Jerusalem. The word on the street is, 'This is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!' Over the past few weeks, no doubt you have had a glimpse of who Jesus is and today we discover more as we journey further with him.

Let us once more welcome Jesus in to our hearts.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! God's faithful love endures forever.

Hymn **Meekness and majesty**

Prayers Approach including the Lord's Prayer

Let us pray-

We give thanks and praise to our Creator for his steadfast love endures forever.

We celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and we walk with him through the coming week.

We thank you that we are able to share with each other through these various media and we wait to hear from you, Mother and Creator of all.

Let us draw near to the one who sets of free

God of forgiveness, forgive every failure in love, every harsh word, every mean action and every destructive thought. Keep us faithful, help us to do justice and be humble.

We are sorry for our failings, give us a new vision, a new hope to see your kingdom come.

Let us draw near to the God of our lives. And all our prayers, we bring together in the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples ...

The Lord's Prayer

Amen

Introduction – Today is Palm Sunday or / and Passion Sunday depending which Gospel reading you chose Either way as we come to the readings this morning I wonder what this Sunday mean to you?.

Silence

Readings

Psalm 118: 1-2 and 19 -29

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever. Let all Israel repeat:

“His faithful love endures forever.”

Open for me the gates where the righteous enter, and I will go in and thank the LORD.
These gates lead to the presence of the LORD, and the godly enter there.
I thank you for answering my prayer and giving me victory!

The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.
This is the LORD's doing, and it is wonderful to see.

This is the day the LORD has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.
Please, LORD, please save us. Please, LORD, please give us success.
Bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless you from the house of the LORD.

The LORD is God, shining upon us. Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar.
You are my God, and I will praise you!
You are my God, and I will exalt you!

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.

Matthew 21: 1-11

As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them."

This took place to fulfil the prophecy that said, "*Tell the people of Jerusalem 'Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey's colt.'*"

The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it. Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Jesus was in the centre of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

"Praise God, for the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD! Praise God in highest heaven!"

The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. "Who is this?" they asked. And the crowds replied, "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (New Living Translation)

Reflection

Although the four Gospels relate the entry into Jerusalem, John's account is the only one which makes mention that at the festival the crowd took palm branches and went out to meet him. It leads us to the link to the Christian celebration of Palm Sunday. The palm leaves through tradition has been associated with national liberation and here too the palms are for Jesus who is seen as a 'national hero', since he raised Lazarus from the dead.

There is also the danger we face as we come to the Easter season, that the accounts of the Triumphal Entry, the Cross, and Easter are so familiar to most of us that we can easily go through the motions of a celebration without ever allowing the message of these events to touch us. The challenge every year is to read these accounts with "fresh eyes".

The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem marked the real beginning of the way of the cross for him. Although his life had been edging that way for some time, today was the beginning of the final count-down and the turning point to the events of Easter time. As we walk with Jesus through to Easter day, our time will be spent in preparation for the suffering and death of an innocent man. But in our preparation, we have hope and believe that weeping last for the night but rejoicing comes in the morning.

The people who lined the streets of Jerusalem to cheer for Jesus this Sunday were silent by Friday.

Sometimes we can find ourselves in similar situations to the Palm Sunday crowd, waving our flags and saying we want what is best for society, but too often looking for the quick fix and the simplistic answers or changing our tune in the face of adversity. Our current situation is one where there is no easy fix and we hope that the world will take time to reflect on the way we live our lives and how we can bring about long lasting change.

I was hoping to focus on the theme of 'obedience' and how difficult it is. Jesus had his instructions from the prophets, about how a powerful (peaceful) yet humble king enters a City. He was about to complete his ministry. Jesus gave instructions to the two disciples who were sent to bring the donkey and the colt to him.

I was intending to make the link to our 'lock down' situation and the importance of adhering to guidelines, such as, social distancing and good hand hygiene. But instead I felt the need to focus on the flowing words, 'if anyone ask, say that the Lord has need them.' (Matt 21:3)

These few words, I believe highlight for us that in sending us out, God gives us the words to say. This would have been an awkward situation and you can imagine the disciples walking towards the village thinking to themselves 'what happens if when we get there and the donkey and the colt are not there? What do we say then?

So, during these extra ordinary days what does the Lord need from us? We find the answer in the words of the prophet, Micah. '*To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God*' (Micah 6:8).

How do these words translate for us today? Where in our world do we see need? Where in our community do we see the need for justice? What little can we do to show mercy and make a difference? And remember if you are asked 'why are you doing this?' - Just recall that Jesus will help you find the words to respond.

God is at work in our lives today and being obedient is not easy as it leads into situations where it seems as if there is no way out. But what a sense of relief when you get there and the colt and the donkey are just there as Jesus said. We give thanks to God for his steadfast love endures forever.

What can I do for my neighbour, my family and my community? I am encouraged to hear stories of people helping their neighbours but as the situation lengthens, remember a phone call can make the difference

Amen

Prayer of Intercession

Before we start to pray, try and find that palm cross which you were given last year or even the previous year. As you pray hold I your hands or place it in front of you as a focal point. All these prayers we bring to the cross, those readout aloud and those said in our hearts.

*Our prayers for our world, countries where there is turmoil, churches in the world, our community and ourselves. In John's Gospel Jesus prayed for the world and his disciples... **Jesus prayed***

'And Abba, my prayer is not for my disciples alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, just as you are in me and I am in you, Father, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Father let them know that I have loved them even as you have loved me. Help me to again hear your encouraging voice, as it strengthens me and fills me with your peace, especially now as my time has come. My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

We pray that we will remain in Christ and will hold firmly to God's word for strength and courage.

We pray for areas in the world where there is conflict (although things have gone quite) – we remember Israel and Palestine, Syria. We pray for all the negotiators and the organisations who work for peace in our time. O great peace, we pray that your peace may rule.

We remember those who have died as a result of COVID -19 (remember especially the people in China, Italy and Spain) and those who are critically ill, and those who are on the way to recovery. We give you thanks for all the people who have come forward to support the work of the NHS. O great healer, we give you thanks

We remember our neighbours – all you ask of us is that we love each other. We think about those who are ill, in hospital and those who are unable to join with us today. Great God of love, may your love enfold us now and always.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Amen

Hymn **Make way, make way**

Benediction

As we leave these few pages, we pray that God will go with us as we take the Jerusalem road and that we will remain in God's love and service.

Bless you, all.