**Palm Sunday 5th April 2020**



**A gathering prayer**

As we gather,
bring your palms and branches, your shouts and praise.
Hosanna to the Son of David!
Hosanna to the King of kings!
Let us journey to Jerusalem
to worship the king who came to save us.
**Amen.**



**You are the King of Glory**
You are the Prince of Peace
You are the Lord of heaven and earth
You're the Son of righteousness
Angels bow down before You
Worship and adore for
You have the words of eternal life
You are Jesus Christ the Lord

**Chorus**

Hosanna to the Son of David
Hosanna to the King of Kings
Glory in the highest heaven
For Jesus the Messiah reigns

**A prayer of approach**

Lord God, let us approach with shouts of praise:
hosanna in the highest!
Let us draw close to you
on this day that caused disturbance and disruption.
Let us approach the throne
of the one who came as a humble servant,
who came to set us free, to change things for ever.
Hosanna to the one who comes in the name of the Lord. **Amen.**



**A prayer of confession**

Lord Jesus, you came to change the world.
Forgive us when we become complacent, when change is difficult – and we give up.

Lord Jesus, you came to serve, not to be served.
Forgive us when we put ourselves and our needs before those of our brothers and sisters.

Lord Jesus, you came to bring peace.
Forgive us when we cause more fights, more trouble, and more wars than peace.

Lord Jesus, you came to set the captives free.
Forgive us when we don’t stand up for justice and freedom for our neighbours.

Lord Jesus, you came to meet us where we are.
Forgive us when we don’t stand with each other through the pain and struggle.

Help us to change the world by serving one another, working for peace,
standing up for justice, and walking with our fellow pilgrims.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

*based on Psalm 118*

Give thanks to the Lord,
**his steadfast love endures for ever.**
We celebrate Jesus, arriving in Jerusalem on a donkey,
coming as a humble peacemaker.
**We give thanks to the Lord;**
**his steadfast love endures for ever.**
The crowds came out to wave branches and lay down their coats, shouting ‘Hosanna, Hosanna’.
**We give thanks to the Lord;**
**his steadfast love endures for ever.**
He came to turn the world upside down,
to serve, not to be served.
He came as a liberator, to set people free.
**We give thanks to the Lord;**
**his steadfast love endures for ever.**
**Amen.**

**Gospel: Matthew 21.1-11**

I heard of one family this week who decided to do an April Fools on their children. They told then that schools had reopened as part of the national effort to combat coronavirus and that they needed to get up early and get ready. So, the kids got up at 7am, got their uniforms on, had their breakfast, packed their bags and were all ready to leave the house when the parents sprang the prank: ‘April Fools!’ As you can imagine the children weren’t amused.

I don’t know whether the children were upset or excited at the thought of school going back and a resumption of normality. Two weeks into isolation maybe it’s working out well for you – better than you feared. Maybe it’s the opposite – its worse than you feared.

There was a tale going around of a woman who encouraged her husband to go to the seaside. He protested. ‘There are drones in the air spying on you and police roadblocks fining people who make unnecessary journeys.’

His wife said, ‘Don’t worry about that. You get out of the house for a day, leave me alone, and I’ll gladly pay any fine’.

I know some people are taking the opportunity to do those house jobs they have been putting off for a long time. Others are sorting their gardens. Others are finding new hobbies or catching up with reading or posting social media clips!

For others it is a nightmare. I have heard of people being made redundant, put on furlough, having wages dramatically reduced, or in the case of those self employed having their income decimated.

This week we will hear from the government as to whether this time of quarantine will be extended. There has been various suggestions this week that we could go on to the summer, even November. Yet there has been mounting pressure to save the economy and people’s livelihoods. The interest of the economy will be pitted up against scientific advice about the spread of the virus and in the middle the politicians will make the final call on policy. It is an unenviable choice which no doubt will disappoint some and lead to criticism by others.

All this of course against the backdrop of increasing numbers of fatalities to this disease, which is no discriminator of persons and though it mainly targets these who are elderly and have underlying health problems, occasional deaths of the young and healthy should make everyone cautious about being too casual.

Yesterday one of our church members died of coronavirus. It has knocked on our door and come into our house. We hold her husband and her daughter and all her friends and family in our prayers at this sad time. We grieve for our loss, but may God comfort us as those who grieve with hope, that no one is separated from the love of God because of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. As we turn into Holy Week the events of this week transform our human existence and our hope.

Palm Sunday is one of those distinctive Sundays in the church year when we think of donkeys and palm branches and use the word Hosanna in our worship. Hosanna literally means ‘Save Us’.

Save Us.

It is an apt prayer for the world at the moment.

When Jesus marched into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday the crowds shouted Save Us Son of David. We kind of think it was a children’s day Sunday school outing. The sun shining, a cute donkey, lots of people smiling and waving, the women and children having a nice time, a nice day out, like being at the carnival or the street parade. All good humored and fun.

Think again. Put some men into this crowd -indeed picture that Palm Sunday crowd as being predominantly men -all shouting ‘Save us son of David’. You may get a different mood, a different vibe a different expectation welling up in that Palm Sunday crowd.

Men generally are more competitive, aggressive and self-focused. If they turn out in crowds its usually because they are either passionate or angry. Or passionately angry – think protest, strikes demos. Don’t think carnivals and fetes.

Historians note that the decades around the time of Jesus the Jewish people were under the thumb -oppressed by Roman rule, humiliated and shamed and impoverished. The religious rulers of Israel, the Sanhedrin were seen as collaborators with the Romans – keeping their pay masters happy whilst also trying their best to control the masses. The oppressed Jewish people were desperate for a Messiah to ride into town and cause a revolution. Overthrow the Romans, kick out the collaborators, save the nation and restore its freedom and dignity.

Here is Jesus – he is an inspiring figure, he reputedly can do miracles, he is fearless against injustice, he attracts crowds and teaches with authority. He is our next best hope of kicking out the Roman oppressors. Save us Son of David!

As an avid football supporter, I well know that crowds can be fickle. One moment you are their hero. The next you can turn out to be the villain. If the crowd doesn’t get what they want, they can turn on you. Indeed, Holy Week is all about a crowd turning on Jesus.

‘He is supposed to be our Saviour? He can’t even save himself’. So, the crowd taunted Jesus from the cross on Good Friday. This crowd who shouted ‘Save Us Son of David Hosanna’ would shout ‘Crucify him’ come Friday.

Disappointment and disillusionment because their Saviour didn’t turn out to be who they thought he would be. They were looking for a military hero, someone who would stand up to their enemies and get rid of them and restore honor and freedom to the people. What they got was someone who said love your enemies and went around forgiving people and convicting people of their own hatred and intolerance and injustice. And Jesus didn’t even do the odd sideshow miracle that week in Jerusalem. How disappointing.

I was reading an article by a group of researchers into trauma and disaster[[1]](#endnote-1). They said

*Community responses to disaster typically show a ‘heroic phase’, full of energy and self-sacrifice, which burns itself out and is followed by a ‘disillusionment phase’, which may contain much mutual blame and suspicion. Only as the disillusionment phase loses its force can realistic, hopeful re-making take place*.

There have been plenty of heroes so far in this crisis. The now weekly tradition of clapping the carers on Thursday evening at 8pm is a gesture of appreciation to those on the frontline in the battle against this virus. Those in the health service get most of the appreciation, but anyone who is keeping essential services going can count themselves in this collective effort. Those who are underpaid and undervalued by society are now being appreciated for their efforts.

But there is already blame being apportioned for this crisis and although political leaders have had a virus bounce in their popularity ratings as people rally together – as more bad news comes so will criticism and disillusionment and disappointment.

Battle language is often deployed in this crisis. Yet unlike wartime the enemy is invisible, and the action is not aggressive, with guns and bullets but with care, compassion, community action and resilience, science and reason.

Who are the heroes in the midst? Who will save us? What will save us?

I have a friend who has discovered the new Disney Channel and he is using this time of isolation to catch up on watching all the Marvel superhero films like Iron Man, Spiderman, Wonder Woman, Captain America, the Incredible Hulk. Comic book superheroes are very predictable. They fly in often with their cape trailing in the breeze and then sort out the baddie. They usually destroy the odd city in the struggle and will come near death themselves, but at the last they will find reserves of strength and will power to rise from the floor of defeat and provide the knock out blow to make the enemy meet their match and come to a sticky end. Kerpow!

On that first Palm Sunday, I’m sure the hope of the crowd shouting ‘hosanna, save us’ – was a similar hope for a superhero. Jesus of course redefines what it is to be heroic and calls us to the same path.

Read the gospels between Palm Sunday and Easter and you’ll find the blueprint of what makes a true superhero:

Someone who is willing to serve others and are not so full of their own self-importance that they wouldn’t stoop down and wash the feet of another human being. (John 13 Matt 25.31-46)

Someone who is not just in it for themselves and what they can get but is prepared to risk opposition in standing against exploitation and injustice by metaphorically turning over the tables in the temple exposing how people and systems rip off others. (Matt 21.12-22)

Being generous to all even when it upsets patriotism and nationalistic fervor. (Matt 20.1-16; 21.28-46; 22.1-14)

Standing up against hypocrisy (Matt 23)

And the big one: forgiving others – even your enemies, even those who are crucifying you! (Luke 23.26-46)

Jesus is not the sort of hero the crowd expected. They wanted a conquering monarch, a military leader, not a peacemaker riding on a donkey, on the way to a cross. Expectations can distort vision, so for many – those who want quick solutions rather than the revolution of the heart – Jesus is a disappointment. In a culture that worships power, celebrity and heroes, Jesus is seen as a failure. Yet power declines, celebrity fades, heroes dwindle... What endures? What sustains?

They were disappointed and disillusioned – we may be disappointed and disillusioned that Jesus isn’t the hero we need at this time.

But he is the hero we need. He is the one who can truly save us:

 from our sin,

from ourselves,

from evil,

and through the cross and resurrection from suffering and death.

These next few weeks will be testing times. You may become disillusioned and disappointed. Your faith may be tested. Perhaps Jesus isn’t going to save you as you thought. Perhaps he isn’t the superhero you were led to believe.

But next Sunday we will proclaim He is risen. He is the Lord.

I hope through this painful time there will be realistic hopeful remaking of your faith. That God will be more present with you giving you strength to keep faith, to forgive, to love, to serve, to think of others as much as yourself, to find the hero within that God knows you are and calls you to be.

Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna.

**Prayers of intercession**

*Use a cross, and if you have one a candle or nightlight, as a focus for prayer. Read Psalm 22, the psalm from which Jesus quoted on the cross. Then pray:*

Holy God, as we enter this most solemn week in the Christian year,
in these extraordinary times,
help us to lament with the psalmist.
As we are restricted in what we can do
and must worship in households rather than in church buildings,
help us to remember that the church is not closed –
for church is people not buildings.
We pray for all with whom we normally worship Sunday by Sunday…
God in your mercy,
**hear our prayer.**

Holy God, we pray for those in authority as they grapple with the unexpected.
Guide those who are giving the world’s leaders knowledge and expertise in these times.
Give wisdom and courage to all in leadership,
and when this is all over may humankind emerge strengthened.
God in your mercy,
**Hear our prayer.**

Holy God, as we hear and see the news
and exchange thoughts on social media,
help us to remember all those less fortunate than ourselves, among them:
those who are lonely,
those who are angry,
those who are distressed,
those who are at their wits end,
those who are struggling to get home,
those who cannot get the help they need…
God in your mercy,
**Hear our prayer.**

Holy God, we remember all those who are working to keep things going:
those working in the NHS and those around it helping to keep things working,
those keeping our streets clean and collecting our rubbish,
those harvesting, delivering and selling the food in our shops,
those keeping us secure and our utilities functioning,
those looking after the children of key workers,
those helping to care for the elderly and vulnerable,
clergy of all religions seeking to minister in difficult times…
God in your mercy,
**Hear our prayer.**

Holy God, we remember those who have died,
whether from Covid-19 or from other causes.
We pray for their families and friends
especially as they arrange funerals so different from what they expected.
We pray that they and we may come at the last to find peace in your presence.
God in your mercy,
**Hear our prayer.**

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.

God in your mercy

Hear our prayer.
**Amen.**

 1 **Ride on, ride on in majesty!**Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry;
O Savior meek, pursue your 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.

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 pow'r and reign.

**A prayer for all ages together**

*All join hands, step forward and say together after each phrase:*
**We are pilgrims on your journey.**

We celebrate with the crowds, pouring into Jerusalem.
Jesus, you rode on a donkey and coats were laid at your feet… **We are pilgrims on your journey.**
The crowds waved palm branches and shouted, ‘Hosanna’…
We sing and shout praise to you, Lord Jesus…
You came knowing the sacrifice you were about to make…
You came to change the world…
Thank you for the sacrifice you made for us…
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

**Let us go in peace to follow Jesus**

**On the way that leads to the cross**

**And onward to eternal life Hosanna in the highest.**

**Amen**

1. <https://tragedyandcongregations.org.uk/2020/03/24/guidance-for-ministers-as-the-coronavirus-crisis-deepens/?fbclid=IwAR2okZop5k9QA_IihfVEF9G3zL5u8cRIOZVjyXzSN6ijDYo73aRFyKT_HlU> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)