**Palm Sunday 24th March 2024**

**Call to worship**

Jesus is king!
King of creation, of all nations, of our lives!
Let us worship with joy, gratitude, and respect.
Hosanna to the Son of David,
to God’s Anointed One!
Hosanna to the king who rides a peaceable donkey!
Hosanna here and in the highest!

**A gathering prayer**

Jesus, king extraordinary,
you call us to fight with you against the world’s evils,
but you also promise us peace and reconciliation.
As we seek to understand you better,
give us courage to follow your example,
patience to keep working at self-control and peace-making,
and thankful hearts for the power for good your love brings.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

King of kings, we gather, we clamour, to worship you.
You are not clad in gold and jewel-encrusted crown,
you are not carrying orb and sceptre,
but you are the King of kings,
serving, loving, caring for us.
And we come to worship you, to sit at your feet,
to hear your word, to know your truth.
Bless us as we worship.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord of lords, King of kings,
your love for us transforms and startles us.
Your gift to us amazes and bewilders us.
Your life given for us brings us to our knees.
Your abundance reveals our poverty.
Your presence comforts and upholds us.
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord of lords, King of kings,
We adore you like no other.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Jesus of Nazareth, born for us in Bethlehem, you humbled yourself for us on a donkey riding to Jerusalem. You called us to serve you and in easy times we lay down coats for you and spread branches on the road. But then when the going gets tough, when we are called out to stand up for you, so often we lose our voice, mutter under our breath, turn the other way and walk not with you but stand rooted to the spot with fear. Forgive us, Lord Jesus, that we so often do not shout out for your kingship.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

No matter how much we deny or betray you, Jesus, in your great mercy, you wipe away our tears of sorrow and regret, you cleanse us from the pain and anguish, and you shout out to us that our sins, even ours, are forgiven. Praise God.
**Amen.**

**Palm Cross**

**Palm leaves** – shout Hosanna and the next crucify.

**Pointer:** Jesus points us the way to God and God’s way – loving others, serving others

**Sword** But prefer to fight and challenge and compete and be greedy and selfish.

Arrested Jesus and do away with this troublemakers

**An X for Wrong**

All the wrongs in the world put Jesus on the cross. Wrongs of self-centredness, greed, power used for selfish reasons, jealousy, envy, pride, anger.

Jesus didn’t repay wrongs with more wrongs. Two wrongs don’t make a right as they say.

**An X as a Kiss**

No instead he showed love on the cross. He prayed for those who crucified him. He said father forgive. X is a sign of kiss, the sign of love. God kissed a guilty world with love.

**Cross**

– arms out wide – showed love for each other a better way to bring people together and reconcile

Vertical bring people to God, know the love of God for each of us.

**Sign post.**

 - reminder, a pointer

**Mark 11.1-11**

**Sermon**

In a church Sunday school one little boy's family was blessed with triplets. Soon afterwards his parents decided to bring the three babies for baptism. The little boy excitedly ran into class one morning telling everyone how his grandma, grandpa and all his cousins were coming to visit. When asked why they were coming he said with all conviction and excitement "MY BABIES ARE BEING CAPSIZED!"

Capsized not baptised!

Well in a way there is a profound understanding about what baptism is. A capsizing, a turnover, a new life, out with the old and in the new.

It is all a sign, a sacrament, of what Jesus did this week, this Holy Week, in overturning the world, overturing sin and evil and death, reversing the decay and degradation of our world and restoring our relationship with our Creator, making all things new and promising the hope of everlasting life.

This week is all about a new start and a new covenant.

Do you want a new start in life? Do you want to know a peace that passes understanding, a peace at the centre of your soul?

This Lent we have been looking at the big story of the Bible. Most people have a bible in their home. Most people haven’t read it. It has shaped Western culture and our laws and customs and attitudes through the centuries. We wouldn’t have human rights if it weren’t for the Bible. If we followed science about what value human being have in the world we would conclude that it is the survival of the fittest. The powerful win and the weak go to the wall. But the Bible says we are all created in the image of God, of great value and worth. We are beloved. Just as parents gaze on their new born babay with such love, so God gazes on each one of us with such love.

During Lent we have been looking at the promises or covenants in the bible that God makes towards humanity. Promises which show God loves us.

Frederick Buechner the American Presbyterian minister said the Bible has a central plot:

‘Despite its extraordinary variety, the Bible is held together by having a single plot. It is one that can be simply stated: God creates the world; the world gets lost; God seeks to restore the world to the glory for which God created it’.

We get lost. We lose our sense of what is important, what is a good way to live. We lose contact with our Creator, the one who loves us and gave us life – out of ignorance, out of forgetfulness or out of rebellion and a false sense of freedom. Jesus said once you know the truth about yourself and life then you are truly free. Free to live in right relationships with others and with God.

I’m sure we have all made promises that we haven’t kept.

The Bible says God is a covenant-keeping God. A God of faithfulness. A God of His word. Even if we aren’t.

A covenant is like a contract except that it is a relationship between parties characterized by faithfulness and loyalty in love. So, unlike breaking a contract, where you pay the penalty for breach of contract but then walk away, a covenant is more moral and about relationships – so more difficult to break. Which is why we call marriage a covenant, not a contract.

There are many covenants in the bible that describe humanity’s relationship to God over the centuries.

The first is the covenant with Adam and Eve: They would have dominion over the works of God's creation. The second is with Noah: God would not destroy the earth with water again. The third is with Abraham): God would guarantee that Abraham's descendants would survive and prevail. The fourth is with Moses: God gave to Israel a sacred charter to guide them.

There is also the Palestinian Covenant which is about God’s promises of land to God’s people, [Deuteronomy 30:1-10](https://www.bibleref.com/Deuteronomy/30/Deuteronomy-30-1.html), and also the Davidic Covenant [2 Samuel 7:8-16](https://www.bibleref.com/2-Samuel/7/2-Samuel-7-8.html), which is God’s promises to David for an everlasting kingdom.

God then had his prophet Jeremiah promise a new covenant (31:31). God would forgive sin and have a close, unbroken relationship with His people through changed hearts.
Finally God in Christ said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” when he instituted the Lord’s Supper in the Upper Room (1 Cor. 11:25). Which we will remember and reenact on Maundy Thursday this week.

A new covenant, sealed in my blood. A new start. Capsizing all the other covenants, overturing them in favour of a new covenant.

On Palm Sunday Jesus rides into Jerusalem at the start of the major Jewish festival of Passover. The Jews were wanting a messiah. They hailed Jesus as their coming king. Hosanna, which means God save us,’ Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord they shouted. They wanted a king to overthrow their enemies. The prophecy in the bible, in Zechariah 9.9-10 paints a different picture of a humble and non-violent journey towards Jerusalem. Entering on a donkey, not at the head of an all-powerful army. In this passage, the king will come triumphant to Jerusalem, but to destroy arms and command peace to the nations.

The gospels portray Christ as the revelation of love. He chose the way of non-violence and welcomed all kinds of people into his company and as co-workers. The gospels tell of a Christ whose power was based on an outgoing love, in whom the joy and vitality and self-giving in life was so strong that he had a healing presence. His power was used peacefully for the good of all not for himself. Foolishness to the world where those who are hungry for power try to get to the top to rule over others and make sure they get the best deal, the fattest share of the profits.

When he would share the Last Supper with his disciples Jesus would not give them theories as to how to understand his death and how it dealt with our sin. He gave his followers an act to perform. A meal to share, in which the words and actions carry great significance. So, the words 'break' symbolises our need to facilitate sharing in our lives. The words 'take' reflect his self-giving and offering of himself for the needs of the world and the challenge for us as his followers to offer ourselves for the needs of the world. Breaking and taking are central to Christ’s memorial.

New covenant sealed with my blood.

I remarked a few weeks ago that in ancient times, covenant partners would engage in a ceremony where each step symbolized the new relationship they were entering. First, animals would be slaughtered, split along the spine, and laid out on the ground each piece across from its other half.

Then, the partners would exchange outer robes symbolizing the taking on of a new identity now being a representative of the other. At this time, one or both might also be given a new name to further express this new identity.

Then, they would comingle their blood by making a cut in their arm or hand and either dripping the blood into a cup from which they would each drink or by clasping hands allowing the other's blood to flow directly into each other's bodies.

It sounds a bit like a Guy Ritchie gangster movie, or something straight out of Peaky Blinders.

Subsequently, they might rub dirt or ash into the wound in order to create a permanent scar as a visible reminder of this covenant.

Then, the parties would pass between the slaughtered animal halves calling the gods to bless the other person if they upheld this agreement and calling down curses on the other person and themselves if either should fail to live by this covenant. Finally, the animals would be sacrificially offered to the gods and a feast prepared and eaten together in this new relationship of unity.

This covenant is made through the ceremonial process of cutting. The two parties essentially became one tribe or clan now holding the rights and responsibilities to each other of blood kinship.

On the cross Jesus is cut and beaten. His blood is shed.

Yet despite all the anger and hatred, the sin and the evil that put him on the cross, the passions and attitudes that are still with us today, in our society, in us, Jesus did not condemn. He did not call down a legion of angels to zap his enemies, as may happen in a Marvel film about some superhero.

Instead, he prayed from the cross. ‘Father forgives them, they don’t know what they are doing’.

That is why we sing about love so amazing so divine.

This new covenant is sealed in the blood of Christ, as a sign of God undying commitment towards us. God forgives us. God’s love to us: even if we don’t deserve it. Even if it’s not fair. Jesus took it all and gave back love.

This is a new deal.

In the ancient story of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were given one command, with a clear consequence for disobedience.

When Adam and Eve failed to keep God's commandment, God established the covenant of grace. This covenant of grace is seen clearly in Jesus Christ, with salvation offered as a free gift of grace by faith ([Ephesians 2:8-9](https://www.bibleref.com/Ephesians/2/Ephesians-2-8.html)).

Other covenants are similarly broken by humans yet kept by God's grace. Abraham failed God at times, yet God's grace was sufficient. The Davidic Covenant was fulfilled despite David's sins.

In the New Covenant, Jesus fulfills the law and offers salvation to those who turn to Him. He does not fail as other humans had but fulfills the covenant both as a human and as God. All the earlier covenants find fulfillment in Jesus, who claims not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it ([Matthew 5:17](https://www.bibleref.com/Matthew/5/Matthew-5-17.html)).

He restores peace and right relationship with God. Like Noah’s ark he offers an ark of salvation through the floods of sin, evil and death. The cross leads to resurrection and new hope and redemption.

Like Abraham he becomes the father of the true Israel, the people of faith, which is not down to where you are born and what race you are born into, but down to new birth, through baptism and the spirit of God, making you a new person in the family of faith.

The ten Commandments are replaced by love for God, written on our hearts: we want to love God and love our neighbour, not because we must, thou shalt and thou shalt not. But because we want to. Because God’s Spirit is transforming our spirit -a new creation, a new relationship.

Jesus is the true King, superseding David, David’s greater son, the one who shows what true servant leadership looks like – using power for good and for healing and reconciliation.

This is a momentous week, Holy week, when we recall all these historical events that capsized our world.

We are prone to forget in our society the world changing impact of Jesus and what the Christian faith means for us and our understanding of life. It literally is life changing.

Christians claim that the massive problems of the world: evil, suffering, sin, death are addressed and answered by God through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

This event, two thousand years ago, is now largely overlooked by most in our contemporary society as irrelevant, as a fable, as insignificant. Easter is all about chocolate eggs and bunnies. The cross and resurrection is insignificant, an embarrassment.

In the internet age and our post truth society, full of conspiracy theories. A recent survey said 40% of the British public believe that Jesus was a myth or a legend and the stories of the cross and resurrection are all made up. I will be looking at those conspiracy theories next week on Easter Sunday.

We have all been made aware of the power of the internet for spreading nonsense with the recent rumours about the Princess of Wales. When Catherine so movingly and bravely shared about her cancer the pother day, those rumours were exposed for the malicious gossip they were.

She ended her statement by saying:

*At this time, I am also thinking of all those whose lives have been affected by cancer. For everyone facing this disease, in whatever form, please do not lose faith or hope. You are not alone.*

You can understand the sentiment but it begs the questions, faith in what? Hope where?

Faith in your medical team, faith in yourself? But what if you all fail. Death will come at some point. Where is your hope?

On Thursday this week we will have the funeral of Allan Brookes a member of this church. Allan was diagnosed with melanoma cancer four years ago. He tried various treatment but none of them worked. I videoed him sharing a testimony of how his faith had been affected through it all for our Carol Service in 2021, which was affected by Covid. The family want me to show that video at the funeral on Thursday. In it he reiterated his belief in God who gives us life and Jesus who intercedes for us. He said if he gave up on that what would he have left? There would be no one to go to. No meaning just emptiness.

He asked himself the question ‘Why me lord? And decided ‘why not me?

The cross of Christ tells us that God suffers too with us and has entered into our struggles and despair.

I read the story of Will Pearson Gee this week. As a young father , he experienced the tragedy of losing both his wife and one of his children in a terrible road accident. His wife had been returning from a day at the beach with their two children when her car, for reasons unknown, swerved into the path of an articulated lorry. Will’s world fell apart, but when called upon to identify their bodies in the mortuary he recalls a defining moment.

*‘They pulled back the white sheet, and I ranted, and I screamed, and I wept. Then I looked at them and I thought ‘this cannot be the end’? There was so much life, particularly in my little boy- he was such a handful. I just couldn’t believe it was the end of him.*

*At the time I was definitely a ‘nominal’ Christian. I believed there was some higher power, but I really had no idea about his character or whether he cared about me. Then my eye was drawn to a very simple crucifix on the wall of the mortuary. It was a sign of the Christian faith to which I had been exposed since I was a child but never really thought anything about. It’s like a penny dropped, and it suddenly became not just a cross, but a sign of hope for me. I then realized that, if there was all this talk of resurrection and life after death, I needed to find out more about it.’*

Will went on to become a Christian and eventually followed a call into ministry as an Anglican priest. He says that, while he would never have wished the accident to happen, he has nevertheless seen the biblical imperative ‘that in all things God works for the good of those who love him’ Romans 8.28 proved true in his own life.

So, let us remind ourselves of our Christian claim, that such a relatively insignificant event, because the Romans crucified thousands of their subjects and this was just another state execution, turned out to be the most significant event in world history.

There's a remarkable story about the artist Rodin, who one day saw a huge, carved crucifix beside a road. He immediately loved the artwork and insisted on having it for himself. He purchased the cross and arranged to have it carted back to his house. But unfortunately, it was too big for the building. So, of all things, he knocked out the walls, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.

I hope you will decide to knock down the walls and rebuild your life around the cross. Remember, Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.". Through the sign of baptism, through palm crosses, through the events of this week, we once again are confronted with the challenge of Jesus and the offer of a new covenant, sealed in his blood, the chance of a new creation, new birth, and a new start, with God and the family of faith. May we be capsized into God’s love and swim in God’s grace.

**Prayers of intercession**

**We welcome Jesus, we welcome the king.**

We welcome a time of hope and peace.

As we look forward to God’s kingdom, we hope for a time when peace will be the foundation and aim of all nations. We look to the leaders of nations, factions, armies and dictatorships where peace is not present, and we call them to respond to the suffering and heartache around them by negotiating and bringing peace. Among other places, we remember Gaza, Israel, Ukraine, North Korea, Haiti and Sudan.

God of all, you made everything and everyone. We pray that people will respond to your desire for all to live lives of peace and that hope would defeat harm. We pray for all those whose families, lives and futures have been destroyed by war and conflict.

**We welcome Jesus, we welcome the king.**

We welcome a time of love and care.

As we look forward to God’s kingdom, we hope for a time when love and care are the foundation for all that we do. We give thanks for those in caring professions and those who look after others.

God of all, you call all people who are willing to hear. We pray for our health professionals, education staff, parents and carers. We pray that they would be encouraged and strengthened in these times of tight budgets and lack of resources. We remember children and young people who may be facing worries and challenges, and we ask for your help for all who are struggling because of physical or mental health. May they and all in need feel your comfort and healing.

**We welcome Jesus, we welcome the king.**

We welcome a time of safety and well-being

As we look forward to God’s kingdom, we hope for a time when all will feel safe, protected and well. We ask that those who cause harm through bullying, abuse, internet stalking and cruel messaging may repent of the pain and damage they have caused.

God of all, you created us to live in safety. We pray for the police, the criminal justice system and all who work to protect others and investigate those who case harm. We pray for laws to be used wisely, so young and old alike can live free of fear of abuse and bullying. We pray for those who lead and set examples to young people that they would be wise in showing the risks of social media.

**We welcome Jesus, we welcome the king.**

We welcome a time of life and growth.

As we look forward to God’s kingdom, we hope for a time when all be full of the enjoyment of life and will grow in faith in you. We look to those who lead us in church, in our country and our neighbourhoods, that they would work to keep people safe and happy and that they would have the wisdom to spend limited money wisely.

God of all, you give us all we need. We pray for our government and parliament as they use scarce resources, plan budgets and work out how to spend money for the benefit of the nation. We pray for local elections in a few weeks and the campaigning that has just started. We remember our church leaders here and in this area and ask that they would work together across denominations to bring the life and growth that can be found in Jesus to our friends and neighbours.

**We welcome Jesus, we welcome the king.**

We welcome our life and call.

As we look forward to God’s kingdom, and remembering that amazing journey into Jerusalem, we look to ourselves. May each one of us, young and old, know the love of God through the gift of Jesus, the power of God through Jesus’ death and the joy of God through his resurrected life.

God of each one of us, you know all we are and all we need. We pray for ourselves.
May we hear your call on our lives and do all we can to share your love and your kingdom with others.

**Amen.**

**A prayer for all ages together**

Blessed is the king Jesus.
**Hosanna in the highest!** *(clap three times, fast)*
Who comes in the name of the Lord God.
**Hosanna in the highest!***(clap three times, fast)*
Who proclaims love and peace.
**Hosanna in the highest!** *(clap three times, fast)*
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

As the crowds gathered to welcome and celebrate the coming kingdom of freedom, peace and justice, so we lay ourselves before our donkey-riding king, Jesus Christ our Lord. Let his vision be our vision, his kingdom be our kingdom, his call be our call, his journey be our journey, and his life, death and resurrection be our salvation.
**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**
**Amen.**