

As we settle down to share in this Palm Sunday worship together, make sure your candle is lit. Christians all over the world will be marking this day, and even though we are sitting at home, let's make this one of the most memorable Palm Sundays ever!

Call to Worship

Children of God, Rejoice!

Sing out in celebration, God's people! Your King is coming to you, humble, riding on a donkey, on a donkey's foal.

Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the one who comes in the Lord's name. Glory to God! Hosanna!

Praise: Make way, make way for Christ the king

<https://youtu.be/78iCdVc5LVM>

Bible Story– Palm Sunday

<https://youtu.be/z-39h0xYqdE>

Offering: Lord, although we cannot physically make our offerings this morning, we ask you to bless our varied ways of giving at this time: the envelopes, cheques and direct debits all ensure that your church continues to express your love and presence in our world. Amen

Praise: Here comes Jesus riding into town

<https://youtu.be/5jtDqKkdS1M>

Prayer of Confession:

As we move into a time of prayer, grab hold of a piece of paper and tear out the shape of a cross. Hold on to the paper cross and pray this prayer -

Lord God, this cross reminds us of what Jesus went through.

Let us ask his forgiveness as we recall his death for us.

We hold these crosses over our heads.

Jesus, we have sinned in what we have thought.

Cross out our selfish ideas, and fill us instead with your attitude of wanting the best for others.

We hold this cross over our mouths.

Jesus, we have sinned in what we have said.

Cross out our hurtful words, and fill us instead with your concern to speak blessing into others' lives.

We hold this cross in our hands.

Jesus, we have sinned in what we have done.

Cross out the evil we do, and instead make us channels of your peace and love.

We hold this cross over our hearts.

Jesus, we have confessed what comes to our minds.

By your Word and your Spirit, pierce our hearts,

and help us to see deeper into our condition,

so we can be further healed.

We hold this cross over our chests.

Jesus, we thank you for your promise

to forgive all who repent and believe your good news.

Amen.

Reading: Matthew 21:1 – 11

As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives. There Jesus sent two of the disciples on ahead 2 with these instructions: "Go to the village there ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied up with her colt beside her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 And if anyone says anything, tell him, 'The Master[a] needs them'; and then he will let them go at once."

4 This happened in order to make come true what the prophet had said:

5 "Tell the city of Zion,

Look, your king is coming to you!

He is humble and rides on a donkey

and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

6 So the disciples went and did what Jesus had told them to do: 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, threw their cloaks over them, and Jesus got on. 8 A large crowd of people spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds walking in front of Jesus and those walking behind began to shout, "Praise to David's Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise be to God!"

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown into an uproar. "Who is he?" the people asked.

11 "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee," the crowds answered.

Message:

It was a day to celebrate! And times of celebration in those last weeks of our Lord's life were certainly few and far between. Thank goodness we can also reflect on happy times gone past, and I'm sure that our homes are all filled with little and large things that remind us of those times. Perhaps you'd like to take hold of that object, or if it's too large just look at it. Maybe it's a photograph, a gift or maybe just a memory, but nonetheless, it puts a smile on your face!

When he emerged on the public scene Jesus was an overnight sensation. He would try to go off to be alone and the people would still follow him. The masses lined the streets as he came into town. On Palm Sunday leafy palm branches were spread before him and there were shouts of Hosanna. In shouting Hosanna they were in effect saying "Save us now" Jesus. Great crowds came to hear him preach. A wave of religious expectation swept the country.

But the cheering did not last for long. There came a point when the tide began to turn against him. Oh, you didn't notice it so much at first. People still came to see him, but

the old excitement was missing, and the crowds were not as large as they had been. His critics now began to publicly attack him. That was something new.

Earlier they had been afraid to speak out for fear of the masses, but they began to perceive that the fickle public was turning on him. Soon the opposition began to snowball. When they discovered that they could not discredit his moral character, they began to take more desperate measures. Before it was all over, a tidal wave welled up that brought Jesus to his knees under the weight of a cross.

Why did the masses so radically turn against him? How did the shouts of Hosanna on Sunday transform into the shouts of crucify him on Friday? Why did the cheering stop?

One reason why the cheering stopped is that Jesus began to talk more and more about **commitment**. During the last week of Jesus life a very interesting scene occurred, and even more significantly, it occurred in full view of the people.

You know the story well - A rich young ruler came enthusiastically running to Jesus. You are all familiar with the dialogue that took place. Jesus says: Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor and then come follow me. The masses were stunned. They were troubled first for a theological reason. They had been raised to believe that God had especially blessed rich men. Yet, here is Jesus turning the big money away.

Hungry one morning Jesus stops by a fig tree and finds no figs. He withers the tree because it is producing no fruit. Jesus demands fruitful committed lives.

A Parable is told: Who is more committed? The son who says, "I will work" and then does not or the son who says, "I will not work," repents, and gets the work done? It is the son who does the work.

The greatest commandment is given: Love God and Love your neighbour; again, a call to commitment. Commitment means after the shouts of Hosanna we walk to Golgotha carrying his cross of suffering.

Secondly, the cheering stopped when Jesus dared to suggest that **all people are worth loving**. Now look what happens on Palm Sunday. Jesus goes to the temple and drives the moneychangers out. After the temple has been emptied, however, he then invites in the lame, the poor, the sick, the outcasts of society. All are welcome, he says, not just the select few.

Why Jesus, that is not the way to win friends and influence people. Don't you know that? By bringing in these people it is his way of saying all people have access to God. It is his way of saying that this is what the Kingdom of God is going to be like.

Why did the cheering stop? Because on Palm Sunday, Jesus opened the doors of the church to everyone. It angered some people then, and sadly it still does the same thing today.

Finally, the cheering stopped because **Jesus began to talk more and more about a cross**. In the early part of his ministry Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God. Everyone wanted to hear about it, especially since they misunderstood this kingdom to be a restoration of Israel to the days of King David's glory. But increasingly Jesus began to talk about sacrifice - even giving up your life.

Taking one for the team, is a phrase often used in team sports when a player goes the extra mile at risk of injury. Some are prepared to go to these lengths, others will most certainly hang back. Are we prepared to take one for the team? Are we prepared to continue on this journey of holy week where at the end we are confronted with a cross? This is what our belief is all about – self-giving, self sacrifice, and the cross is the greatest reminder of all of that fact.

Prayers of Intercession

Reach out today, Lord, to the frightened, anxious about themselves or their loved ones. Hold them and help them. Reach out to the isolated, the lonely, the vulnerable Hold them and help them. Reach out to the sick, those wrestling with the symptoms of coronavirus, those whose situation is complicated by underlying health conditions. Hold them and help them.

Reach out to those ministering to the afflicted, offering support, comfort and treatment as best they can, but hampered by limited resources and the scale of the crisis. Hold them and help them. Reach out to the bereaved, those already mourning family and friends, their love and companionship snatched away. Hold them and help them.

Reach out to those affected financially – those who have lost jobs and livelihoods, the future they took for granted now under threat. Hold them and help them.

Reach out to the countries of our world most affected – Italy, France, Spain, Iran, China, South Korea, Germany, the United States, Switzerland and the United Kingdom – and the many places elsewhere in the world seeing an increase in infections, and facing imminent catastrophe in turn. Hold them and help them.

Reach out, Lord, to a world in need, a world teetering on the edge of chaos, on the brink of disaster. Hold us, and help us all. Amen.

Pray the Lord's Prayer

Praise: Ride on, ride on in majesty
<https://youtu.be/g-qDQSjnzH8>

Benediction

Take hold of your paper palm cross again....
God our Father, may this palm cross be for us:
signs of Jesus' kingship, reminders of his cross,
and symbols of his victory over sin and death.
Amen.