

Welcome to worship with St John's church on this Palm Sunday, the day when we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
We begin with some words from Psalm 118.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

The Lord is God,

and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of 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 love endures forever.

Psalm 118:26-29

We praise God in the words of the song, Praise is rising – Hosanna!

Song

Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you, we turn to you.

Hope is stirring, hearts are yearning for you, we long for you.

'Cause when we see you, we find strength to face the day;

In your presence all our fears are washed away, washed away.

Hosanna, hosanna,

You are the God who saves us,

Worthy of all our praises.

Hosanna, hosanna,

Come, have your way among us;

We welcome you here, Lord Jesus.

Hear the sound of hearts returning to you, we turn to you.

In your kingdom broken lives are made new, you make all things new.

Brenton Brown & Paul Baloche © 2005 Thankyou Music/ Integrity's Hosanna! Music

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are truly worthy of all our praises. We greet you today as King of kings and Lord of lords. Thank you that your love for us is so great that you were prepared, not only to live as one of us, but to enter Jerusalem knowing that you faced suffering and death, so that our sins could be forgiven. Thank you Jesus that you overcame sin and death, rising to new and everlasting life which you invite us to share. Lord, we are sorry for those times when our words and actions might suggest that we do not even know you, and for all the times we are tempted to 'go along with the crowd' rather than doing what we know to be right. Please forgive us, and by your Holy Spirit help us to be committed once again to following your example and to showing your love in all we do and say. Help us to

acknowledge you as Lord of our lives, and to offer you our worship wholeheartedly today in Jesus' name. Amen

Lord's prayer:

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

Reading Mark 11:1-11

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

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

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.

Sermon

The people had been hearing great things about Jesus – how he had challenged those in authority, healed the sick, and fed the hungry. They'd no doubt also heard about the raising of Lazarus and would have had high hopes that Jesus was the answer to all their problems. Jesus the promised King who would bring freedom and justice to the Jewish people.

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem the 'great crowd' is there for the feast of Passover. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus tells us that over 2 million people would come to the Holy City for this event each year – and these people would have heard of Jesus' arrival. Not surprisingly they go out to see what's going on, to catch a glimpse of the man who was quickly becoming the talk of the town. And so the people lined the road, jostling to catch a glimpse of the latest celebrity, but also for many, to greet the man who would be their king.

They went out to greet him waving branches (John identifies them particularly as palm branches) and shouting, 'Hosanna!', 'Save us!'

In many lands in the ancient Near East, it was the custom to cover in some way, the path of someone thought worthy of the highest honour. 2Kings 9:13 reports that Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, was treated this way. Also the palm branch was a symbol of triumph and

victory in Jewish tradition – we see evidence of such symbolism in other parts of the Bible (e.g., Leviticus 23:40 and Revelation 7:9). Because of all this, the scene of the crowd greeting Jesus by waving palms and carpeting his path with them and their cloaks was loaded with symbolism. Every picture, as they say, tells a story.

Such symbolism is seen elsewhere too...

The actual Greek words used here for palm and branches are rare but those same words occur in the accounts of two other triumphal entries into Jerusalem. During the middle of the 2nd century BC, Jerusalem was ruled by the Graeco-Syrian dynasty of several kings called Antiochus who were determined to eradicate Jewish faith and worship. After Antiochus III desecrated the temple, Judas Maccabeus led a successful revolt and was able to rededicate the temple in 164 BC. And he was greeted by processions of people, waving 'palm branches' (2 Maccabees 10:7). Some years later, his brother Simon recaptured the citadel of Jerusalem from Antiochus VI, and this was also celebrated with 'palm branches' (1 Maccabees 13:51). When the crowds took 'palm branches' to greet Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, there was no doubt that they were acclaiming him as a conquering hero. What's more, they also sang verses from Psalm 118, with its cry of 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel'.

Jesus, to this point, has been a most reluctant hero - he would have been well aware of the dangers of being declared king while the city is under the control of the Roman emperor. Also he doesn't want to be pushed into the role of the warrior liberator like the Maccabean leaders – despite the expectations of those around him, he is not about to lead an armed struggle against the Romans. And so he comes in a rather understated way by finding a young donkey, rather than the proud and warlike horse that would be expected for a king. John of course recognises this as a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy of the coming peaceful king: 'Lo your king comes to you, humble and riding on a donkey'.

Up to this point Jesus has been telling those he cured not to tell anyone. We hear in the gospels that he has also been disappearing whenever the people attempted to make him king. They wanted a Messiah who would rule with military might and free them from Roman occupation. But our Lord wanted to teach them by his words and miracles that his kingdom is of heaven, not of earth, and he wishes even now to reign in hearts, not in palaces. Today, though, as they approach Jerusalem things are different. Now is the time – Jesus' hour is at hand. Today he allows them to proclaim him as king to teach us to look for kingship not in one who is dominating and ambitious but in One who is humble and obedient. Therefore our Lord – who of course would have had every right to ride into Jerusalem on a golden throne, with teams of chariots and horses, on a path of fine tapestries and gold – rides instead on the poor throne of a donkey along a path of cloaks and palm branches. And he does this amidst those shouts of: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, *the king of Israel*" (Jn 12:13).

If we think about the historical precedents of such events – coupled with the fact that the people were waiting and longing for the promised Messiah – add into that all the stories of Jesus that were circulating at the time – and you get an incredibly heady mix that would whip the festival crowd into a frenzy that we might today term mass hysteria. Just imagine the news headlines – fears of riots as crowds take to the streets – countryside destroyed as fans rip branches from trees – King or cartoon – disbelief as conquering hero rides a donkey. Here at last, the long-awaited Saviour. The whole crowd would be caught up in the excitement, the euphoria of the day.

But soon the headlines would change – leader discredited – fallen hero left alone to face his critics – Jesus shamed before the council – death penalty for 'would-be king'. And the

mass response of the crowds would change too – always better to ‘go with the flow’ - well they can’t all be wrong – I suppose we must’ve been mistaken – ‘crucify him!!’ It’s very easy to be drawn along with the crowd whether for good or bad and that is something we must be wary of. Sometimes it seems easier to ‘go with the flow’, not to defend Jesus in a world that doesn’t seem to care about him. We may feel quite euphoric today, shouting and singing Hosanna along with the crowds of many centuries ago while we are safe in our own homes, maybe in the company of like-minded people – but what of tomorrow when someone says there is no God, or someone else denies the existence of Jesus. Will we stay true to our Lord, or will we join in with the mob shouting for his death?

The thing that struck me as I read the story from Mark’s gospel for today was the fact that Jesus made this wonderfully dramatic entry into Jerusalem but then, after a quick look round the temple he left again – it actually says ‘Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. He looked around carefully at everything, and then he left because it was late in the afternoon. Then he went out to Bethany with the twelve disciples.’ Why go there if he was going to leave again immediately? That surely suggests that the entry into Jerusalem was in itself something very significant. When Jesus paraded into Jerusalem with his band of followers as the crowds were getting ready for Passover, was he actually enacting the most amazing piece of theatre? Was he in fact, in the same way as theatre groups at festivals might do, grabbing the attention of the crowd in order to encourage them to want to find out what the ‘real show’ is all about?

There will be services available during the coming week, to help you reflect on the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and I encourage you to set aside the time to take a look, and to reflect on this most dramatic of all times - to sit with Jesus as he shares bread and wine with his disciples and shows them how to remember him - to stand with him as he is wrongly accused and humiliated - and to walk with him as he climbs the hill to his crucifixion and death. It is only when we fully appreciate all that Jesus was prepared to undergo for us that we can truly celebrate all that he achieved through his resurrection. Stay close to Jesus during this week so that you can experience the full impact of the passion, death and resurrection of the Blessed One who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna! Amen

Prayers *Written by Judith Ramsey*

Father God, we remember today, how Jesus rode into Jerusalem, as a King of Peace, and faithfully followed the road to Calvary, and won our Salvation by His death on our behalf.

Help us follow His faithfulness, and fix our eyes on you.

Guide our thoughts and deeds, by your Holy Spirit, to live our lives for you.

Shine your light in the dark places, and root out fear, violence and lies, which lead people astray.

Strengthen those key workers, with their heavy workloads, and give courage to those who feel discouraged and weary.

Give wisdom to world leaders, and those in authority, to make wise decisions, which will affect the lives of many.

Bring comfort to the weary, sick, bereaved and whose who fear for the future.

In a moment of silence, we bring to you those in need of our prayers.....

Thank you, Lord, that we can bring all these people and matters to You and leave them in your loving care.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Poem

Jesus, the Messiah, does not always come in the way we might expect. This poem is entitled 'Palm Sunday'.

No donkey this time
but a borrowed Honda 550.
Jesus riding into town
with a black leather jacket,
jeans frayed at the knees,
and L-O-V-E tattooed
on the knuckles of his right hand.
Those who saw him
said his smile was like the sun,
warming shadowed corners
and causing the way to blossom
unexpectedly.
Those who saw him told
of all the light left over
to be taken home and set
in eyes, in hearts
and at windows for strangers.
It was a miracle,
they said.

The rest of us missed it.
We were in another part of the city,
waiting for the Messiah.

Joy Cowley, Aotearoa New Zealand. From 'Seeing Christ in others' © Geoffrey Duncan 1998

And now let us take the opportunity to greet Jesus the Messiah in the words of the song,
you are the King of Glory.

Song

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.

*Hosanna to the Son of David!
Hosanna to the King of kings!
Glory in the highest heaven,
For Jesus the Messiah reigns.*

Mavis Ford © 1978 Authentic Publishing

Blessing

Loving Father, full of compassion, merciful Saviour, full of grace, life-giving Spirit, full of power, sovereign God, full of majesty, fill our hearts, minds and souls, and send us out to build your kingdom, proclaiming with confidence 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

May God bless you and keep you, may he surround you with his love and fill you with his peace. Amen

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