

NAURC Worship for Palm Sunday
28th March 2021
Led by Revd Ian Bloomfield

Welcome

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation,
lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

John 11:55-57, 12:12-13

⁵⁵ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. ⁵⁶ They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, 'What do you think? Isn't he coming to the festival at all?' ⁵⁷ But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

'Hosanna!' [Hebrew "save"]
'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'
'Blessed is the king of Israel!'

Hymn: Come, now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God, come.

Come, now is the time

One day every tongue will confess You are God
One day every knee will bow
Still the greatest treasure remains for those
Who gladly choose you now

Come, now is the time

One day every tongue

Come, now is the time

Brian Doerksen © 1998 Vineyard Songs

Prayers

We come to worship. To worship You, almighty creator God – you who were in the beginning and created all that is – every flower, every tree, every hill and valley, every

living creature. You who formed us in your image. We come on this Palm Sunday to worship Jesus – to call out Hosanna to the King of kings and Lord of lords. We come to acknowledge the presence of Your Holy Spirit with and within us. We come to thank you that you are always with us.

But we remember too that the acclaim of Palm Sunday was followed in a few days by the call to free the criminal Barabbas, and to crucify Jesus. We confess that we too are not always consistent in putting our faith in to practice: we declare our love, our worship, but allow our lives to be infiltrated by selfish motives. We say how much we care about the poor, the lost, the disadvantaged, the frightened and abused, the homeless, the lonely, the bereaved, but so often take little action to bring about change. Lord, forgive us for our apathy, and motivate us afresh through Your spirit.

We give thanks that, little by little, we are moving towards a relaxation of government restrictions, as infection rates drop and vaccination rates rise. But let us not be complacent – while we are approaching a figure of half the adult population receiving at least one dose, there are many countries where it has barely begun. We pray for global cooperation, for support for the poor and the vulnerable.

We pray for those who, as we emerge from lockdown, come scarred. Scarred by bereavement or long-term changes in their health; those for whom the isolation has brought mental hardship; we pray for our children and young people, still worried about the impact on their education and exam results and the consequences of this for their futures. We pray for your comfort and strength for all who face challenges in the coming days. And we pray especially for those who have had hospital treatment delayed because of pressures on the NHS that their treatment would be available soon.

In silence we remember those known to each of us who need your hand upon their lives today:

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Lord you know each of their needs, and we ask for your blessing upon them.

And, though we are apart, we join together in unity of spirit to pray as Jesus taught, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not in to temptation, but deliver us from evil
For thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴ This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ “Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

¹¹ The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Hymn: Ride on, ride on in majesty!

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark all the tribes ‘hosanna’ cry;
Thine humble beast pursues his road
With palms and scattered garments strowed.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die!
O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin
O’er captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Thy last and fiercest strife is nigh;
The Father on His sapphire throne
Expects His own anointed Son.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die!
Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, Thy power, and reign!

H.R. Millman (1791-1868)

Sermon part 1:

How do you think Jesus felt, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey? It seems an extraordinary thing to be doing. In John 11, the passage which ends with the verses I read at the start, about the people looking for Jesus, is the end of a section about the Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus. V 53-54 say:

So from that day on they [that is, the Pharisees] plotted to take his life. Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

The religious leaders were plotting his death and he goes into hiding with his disciples. Many people have spent the last year in fear – of Coronavirus, particularly as the death toll rose and we understood that this virus was not particular in who it attacked. But we are

grateful too, to those who have stepped out of the shadows, who have risked their own health in order to help others. So often, when interviewed, such people have shown great humility – saying things like “I’m not a hero, I’m just doing my job”. They’ve known immense physical tiredness; felt the emotional strain of seeing so much suffering and coping with so many deaths; some have also endured separation from their families in order to protect them whilst they are putting themselves at risk.

Revd Mia Hilborn has worked as a Chaplain at St. Thomas’s hospital in London for over 20 years, and last April, whilst Boris Johnson was a patient there, the BBC news ran an interview with her, in which she paid tribute to the amazing way that the nursing staff treated each patient with deep care and compassion. I messaged a friend of mine, who knows Mia and her husband David, in case she hadn’t seen it (David, incidentally, is a theological college principal and former minister of City Temple, the URC in central London). My friend replied, adding that Mia had moved into a hotel as her daughter was having chemotherapy and Mia couldn’t risk taking Covid home.

Mia, I’m sure, would say that her calling was to serve God in the hospital: she sacrificed her freedom in order to do what God wanted her to do.

Jesus knew his life was in danger. But, as the feast of Passover approached, he emerged from this quiet village in the wilderness and announced to his disciples that there were going up to Jerusalem. Can you imagine their response? You what, Jesus? Don’t you think that is a rather risky thing to do? Oh well, if you insist, we’ll could go up at a quiet time of day, go in by one of the minor gates, and find somewhere down a backstreet to stay..... Pardon? You want us to borrow a donkey and her colt? You really think that if we just say “the Lord needs them” they’ll let us walk off with them? No deposit, no address, no guarantee we’ll bring them back? I think if I’d been one of those disciples, I’d have been secretly hoping that we couldn’t find the donkey – avoid all that embarrassment.

Anyway, they get the animals, and Jesus makes his entry into Jerusalem in fulfilment of Zechariah’s prophecy.

The crowds call out “Hosanna” – meaning “save”, and quote scripture with the words “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord”. Luke’s gospel reports that some of the Pharisees in the crowd told Jesus to rebuke them for what they were saying. Jesus’ reply was that “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out”. This is a triumphal moment, God made man coming in to the Holy City in fulfilment of scripture – the presence of God cannot be silenced. What a sight, what an entrance – such a clamour that Matthew tells us that the whole city were asking who it was. And the response? *This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.*

You can almost sense the disbelief – Nazareth? Nazareth? The little backwater village in Galilee?

When the writer of John’s gospel reports the calling of the disciples, he tells us that Jesus called Philip, who in turn went and found Nathaniel to tell him that “the one Moses wrote about” had come:

John 1:46

‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked. ‘Come and see,’ said Philip.

Later, in **John 7:40-42** – when Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Festival of Tabernacles:

On hearing his words, some of the people said, ‘Surely this man is the Prophet.’

Others said, ‘He is the Messiah.’

Still others asked, ‘How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?’

Some people were not in possession of all the facts – Jesus was both Galilean and Davidic (with a dose of refugee in Egypt thrown in for good measure). We tend not to read the first 17 verses of chapter 1 in Matthew’s gospel – it’s just a list of names (some of which are hard to pronounce). But of course what Matthew is doing is authenticating that Jesus is a true son of David – born of the Davidic line, and even born in Bethlehem, known as “the City of David”. The Christmas carols “once in Royal David’s City” and “O little town of Bethlehem” are speaking of the same place; the same lowly cattle shed, the same humble birth for the son of God. This is Jesus, son of God, of whom we read in the book of Philippians:

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hymn : At the name of Jesus

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now;
'tis the Father’s pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious, when from death he passed:

bore it up triumphant with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures, to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead, to the Father’s breast;
filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true.
Crown Him as your captain, in temptation’s hour
Let His will enfold you in its light and power.

Brothers, this Lord Jesus shall return again,
with the Father’s glory, with his angel train;
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.

Caroline M Noel (1817-1877)

Sermon part 2

So what next? What, after this noisy entrance, ensuring that everyone knew he was there? The gospels vary a little on the exact timing and sequence, but they concur that Jesus spent time teaching in the temple courts. He had taught about justice, about Love, about the coming of the Kingdom of God. He also caused an uproar there by challenging the corruptness of those taking advantage of the poor to line their own pockets; those who sought to make money out of the system for temple sacrifices – the exchange of currency and the purchase of birds or animals to be offered.

There is a single-mindedness to Jesus' ministry in these final days. He tells the parable of the tenants who murder those who come to collect payments due – even the land owner's son is killed. How painful he must have found telling that parable, knowing that it was but a thinly disguised telling of his own fate.

We know too that a lack of loyalty will soon rear its ugly head – Judas betraying him, Peter denying him, Matthew 27:20 tells us that *“the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.”* Yes, even some of those who were shouting “Hosanna” and laying palm branches down were now calling for his execution.

How often do we deny Jesus? How often do we allow ourselves to be persuaded by earthly desires and worldly objects? How often do we change our tune to suit the occasion? Do we limit what we think Jesus of Nazareth can do for each of us? Oh yes, he was a good man, and his performed some amazing miracles, but that was 2000 years ago in another country, and they didn't have the benefit of the science and knowledge that we have today.

Jesus told Nicodemus that, in order to see the kingdom of God, he must be born again. Nicodemus questioned this at a physical level, and Jesus replied that flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. We need to submit ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit, to allow God to fill us, to envelop us in His presence.

In Romans chapter 8, Paul writes about the Spirit of God being within us, and that we should live according to the Spirit. He continues:

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba*, Father.’ ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Jesus, son of God, son of David, son of Man, came to open the way to the Father so that we too can become children of God. We too are heirs to the inheritance of the kingdom of God, promised throughout the Old Testament, and revealed in Jesus. God rejoices over us as we come humbly to Him. God calls us to step out in faith – to walk in accordance with His Spirit, rather than being swayed by the ways of the world around us. We are called to proclaim “Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna to the King of kings, Glory in the Highest heaven, for Jesus the Messiah reigns”. We are called to come, humbly, to that which is our destiny, to follow Him to the cross, secure in the knowledge that God is with us every step of the way. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

Will you go in the name of the Lord? Will you walk the way, not seeking to fathom every step of the journey before putting your foot forward, but by trusting God, and stepping out in faith that He will never let you go?

Hymn: By faith we see the hand of God

By faith we see the hand of God
In the light of creation's grand design
In the lives of those who prove His faithfulness
Who walk by faith and not by sight

By faith our fathers roamed the earth
With the power of His promise in their hearts
Of a holy city built by God's own hand
A place where peace and justice reign

*We will stand as children of the promise
We will fix our eyes on Him our soul's reward
Till the race is finished and the work is done
We'll walk by faith and not by sight*

By faith the prophets saw a day
When the longed-for Messiah would appear
With the power to break the chains of sin and death
And rise triumphant from the grave

By faith the church was called to go
In the power of the Spirit to the lost
To deliver captives and to preach good news
In every corner of the earth

We will stand...

By faith this mountain shall be moved
And the power of the gospel shall prevail
For we know in Christ all things are possible
For all who call upon His name

We will stand...

We will stand as children of the promise
We will fix our eyes on Him our soul's reward
Till the race is finished and the work is done
We'll walk by faith and not by sight
We'll walk by faith and not by sight

Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, Stuart Townend © 2009 Thankyou Music

Closing Prayer

God of yesterday, God of today, God of all our tomorrows, help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Help us to trust in you and to follow Your calling upon our lives. Help us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, whether that be in triumph and accolade through the palm branches, or on that burdened path to Calvary, carrying the weight of the sins of the world. Help us to follow wherever You lead, since that is the only way to the eternal joy of Your kingdom. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.

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