

Hymn: All glory Laud and Honour (364)

Prayer

We sing to you and give you glory and praise Lord God almighty, the maker and keeper of all things.

We sing to you and give you glory and praise, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God.

We sing to you by the praise you inspire within us, Holy Spirit of God who is ever near us to help and comfort.

On this Palm Sunday as we worship apart, we thank you that by your Spirit you bring us together. We thank you that the faith we hold in common, the love you have for us, the fact that we are your children are bonds stronger than distance. We thank you that in prayer we are always close by your side.

Accept the praises of our hearts, and if we have been weak in our faith, doubtful of your love or poor children of our Father, forgive us and assure us of your presence with us now and always.

Be in our worship apart but together and hear us as we pray as Jesus taught us, 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 debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory

For ever, Amen.

Reading: Luke 19:29-40

The stones would shout out.

On Palm Sunday the church is usually in festive mode. Not as festive as the next Sunday, Easter of course, and there are the difficult days of holy week to get through between the two. But still usually it is a time for the church to have a celebration as we remember that day two thousand years ago when Jesus went into Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowds formed and shouted and waved their branches. The day when it seemed that things were going right for him – not that he fell for that false dawn – the day when people praised him and were so glad to see him, to welcome him, to be near him.

Sometimes churches hold processions on Palm Sunday, and sometimes they wave palm branches – which would be specially imported in these climes. Many years ago when I was a minister in the Borders, I remember a Palm Sunday when the congregation went for a pilgrimage, with a donkey! We walked through various parts of the locality and stopped at different times to reflect and sing praises. The donkey was very patient.

This Palm Sunday we cannot meet to remember and celebrate. And though we may worship God in our hearts and our homes, and though we may bless Jesus God's Son in our prayers and thanksgivings we do it alone or with family. So probably you are not making a lot of noise, though who knows maybe you are!

But maybe this is the year when we need to think about Jesus' words to those who objected to the crowds and the noise and cheering and the general mayhem of that day. He said "I tell you if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

The stones would shout out. Sometime today go outside, if you can, or go to your window if outside is not possible. Look. Look and look and look. There are stones a-plenty for you to see whatever view you are looking on. There are mountain views, and stones in the burns and the riverbeds. There are stones of paths, and tiny pebbles that pop up in the soil, without being asked. Look at the stones. See their shape and colour and texture. Maybe take a stone in your hand to examine. Think about the stones. How old is the stone you are looking at? How long has it been there? What has the world of human beings seen and done and gone through while that stone, that rock, that pebble, that mountain has been around? What do the stones of our land have to say about the God who made them, and what do they say in God's praise?

Take time to look and to listen and to think – press pause and do it now, or do it later, but listen for the stones which shout aloud when human voices are stilled.

Hymn: How great thou art (154)

But maybe Jesus wasn't looking at the natural stones or the land around him when he spoke. He was in Jerusalem by this time and maybe he was looking at the stones of the buildings, the stones of the temple. One of the reasons that since the dawn of time, since the dawn of building, people have made temples and henges and places of worship, is so that when human voices are stilled the work of human hands can still stand as a witness to God and give praise.

People have always put their best into building places of worship. The ancient builders of Stonehenge or of the ring of Brodgar or smaller stone circles put their best mathematics into aligning the stones just so, and probably their best engineering into getting the stones they wanted just in the right place. The best of human architecture went into building temples and cathedrals and even village churches. Our places of worship are important to us. We build them as best we can to say what words cannot about the solidity and light and presence of God.

In these days we have had to lock our churches, which is a difficult thing for many of us. We like to know that they are there and are open so that people can come in and be in a space that is set aside to help them think about God and concentrate on God. But even when we cannot go into our buildings, they are still there, and their stones, the stones which have been hewed, and shaped and put together into a shape that says "church" their stones still speak to those who pass by about the presence of God in the community, the presence of God in all of our present difficult circumstances.

The stones shout aloud.

Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Hymn: Meekness and majesty

As I said, some churches like to use Palm Sunday to make a procession, sometimes waving palm leaves. Other churches like to have their palms in the shape of a cross. I know that

Kingussie church has done that quite recently, and Laggan and Newtonmore have done it in the past. People are given a cross made out of dried palm-leaf. And perhaps this is a better reminder of what was going on that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. People were going wild for him – but he sat on his donkey and wept for the city. Because he knew that this was a false dawn. He knew that all this enthusiasm for him would not last. It was as ephemeral as the dew. He was riding into Jerusalem and he would be pretty sure that the way that tensions had been rising around him, he was probably riding to his death.

And so people make their palms into crosses to remind us of this. They make crosses of palms to remember that human enthusiasm can get it wrong. Those people who cheered and shouted thought that Jesus would be coming to do something military and political, not something peaceable and spiritual. They had got hold of one corner of the notion of who he was and what he was about, and they had painted the wrong picture from that scrap of knowledge.

The praise for Jesus that lasts, as our reading tells us, is the praise that sees the full and amazing picture. The praise that honours him for his humility, for his being prepared to suffer and even die rather than give up his message of God's love; the praise that honours him for going through the whole human experience, from birth to death. This is the praise that we give to our Lord and Saviour. Praise for his integrity, for his being prepared to look a failure in the eyes of the world, praise for his love.

Psalms are made into crosses to remind us that Palm Sunday leads to Holy Week and the we too must watch with Jesus at the foot of the cross. Palm Sunday is a false dawn, but Easter Day is the true and real rising of the Son. But to get there Jesus had to walk the valley of the shadow of death. Which is why we can also praise him for his presence with us when we must walk there also.

To help us walk through Holy Week with Jesus I will continue to post daily devotions on the Laggan and Newtonmore website and the Kingussie Church Facebook page, until Wednesday. On Thursday I will hope to post an audio meditation for Maundy Thursday and on Good Friday a short written reflection to help us read the story of the crucifixion and remain faithful at the foot of the cross.

Prayer

Lord Jesus who knows about the good days and the bad, who understands when life takes unexpected twists and turns, and who sees every path on which we walk, we bring to you our prayers for ourselves and for others.

We pray for ourselves and for each other, members of your family, people who usually worship you together in Laggan, Newtonmore or Kingussie. Lord God you know that we miss each other. We miss coming together on a Sunday. We miss the joy of shared worship. And whole we are grateful that we can be together virtually we are saddened that we have to meet in this way. We ask that you cheer our sad hearts, that you fill our lives with your presence, that you fire our imaginations to discover new ways in which we can be your children.

We pray for the people who are most in our minds in anxious times. We pray for family members whom we cannot be with, for children and grandchildren who are far away, for parents and others whom we want to look after but may not. We thank you that when we cannot physically care for our family, you still hold them in your hands. And we thank you for the others, the friends, the strangers, the paid carers who look after our loved ones, and ask that you give them compassion and strength.

We pray for those of whom we hear who are suffering from the virus around the world. We ask for healing, for strength, for calm and for care to be given them. And we pray for those who put themselves at risk by caring for the afflicted. May they know your blessing and your presence surrounding them.

And, Lord God, we pray that in this time of trial you would help us to discover what our faith means. Help us to realise what you would have us do for others, how you would have us spend our time for and with you, and to see again what matters in our lives, and in your eyes.

We put all our prayers into your hands, all that we are concerned about, all that we cherish, we leave it with you, in confidence and for Jesus's sake, Amen.

Benediction

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The Love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you now and always. Amen.

Hymn: Ride on, ride on in majesty