

**ZOOM Service from Sunday 28th. March 2021; Palm Sunday B
Transcript**

Ed 28.03.21

Introduction and Prayer – Martin

Good morning, wherever you are. It's good to speak to you again.

"We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship."

National Worship Team

Today, Palm Sunday, we read about, and think about, Jesus's entry into Jerusalem.

First, a Prayer:

The gates of Holy Week are open.

In our own places, we celebrate our King,
who entered Jerusalem, riding on a donkey.

Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Hymn: 374 The Servant King

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

As we step into Holy Week,
may our hearts and minds be opened, so that these coming days will indeed be holy for us.
May we live through this time expecting that, in some way, we will meet with God.
May we make times and spaces to remember that God, who knows and understands suffering,
offers to meet us, as we bring our struggles of the past year, and our hopes for the future;
our regrets, resentments, our unhealed hurts; the unspoken things of our inner being.

As we walk again through Holy Week, and focus on Jesus's last journey
we give thanks for the living Word, for ancient stories revealing present truths.
May we reflect on those parts of the story that most deeply touch our hearts at this time:
words of challenge, of reassurance, of support.

As we observe again the sacrifice of Jesus,
his willingness to carry human hatred and violence to death and beyond,
may we know that these acts in history point to the eternal truth of the God
who is always willing to forgive,
always reaching out in love, always offering life in all its fullness.

As we walk with Jesus, facing the consequences of his call,
may he shine his light on the way ahead, show us his will for us,
and the new life we are called to live in his name, in his example, and in his strength.

We pray that, this Easter, we may find the life that he gives
welling up from within our own being.

In his name we ask, and in his words we pray, 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.*

Readings: *Willie Buchan is going to read for us today, first from*

Philippians 2:5-11; NRSVA:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Hymn 392 When I survey the wondrous cross

2nd Reading: Mark 11:1-11, NRSVA:

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."' They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,
'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Amen.

*For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us,
thanks be to God.*

Message:

Nearly 2000 years ago, at the beginning of Passover Week, the most sacred week of the Jewish year, two processions entered the city of Jerusalem.

From the west, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, rode into Jerusalem at the head of a detachment of the Roman army, in a deliberate demonstration of the military power of the Roman empire. The most likely time for political trouble in Jerusalem was Passover time, so they came to reinforce the permanent Roman garrison, but also as a forceful reminder of Roman theology, which proclaimed that the emperor was not only the ruler of Rome: he was the Son of God.

For the Jews, Pilate's procession represented not only a rival social order, but a rival theology.

Meanwhile, from the east, came a very different procession, made up of ordinary people, from the peasant class. Cheered on by the crowd, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives. Jesus brought a message about the kingdom of God.

Mark tells us that this was a 'counter-procession', planned by Jesus in advance. Jesus had sent two of his disciples to fetch a young donkey colt, that had never been ridden. Now, riding into the city, he is surrounded by enthusiastic people, spreading their cloaks and leafy branches on the road, shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord ... Blessed is the kingdom of our ancestor David!"

The message is clear. Jesus deliberately enacts symbolism from the prophet Zechariah. A king would come to Jerusalem, humble, riding on the foal of a donkey, a king who would be a king of peace. Jesus came, meek and lowly, *in* peace, and *for* peace, riding on a donkey colt.

Pilate's procession embodied the power, the glory, the violence of the empire that ruled the world. Jesus's procession declared an alternative vision – the kingdom of God. Jesus came in peace, but with great courage. Yet the people did not understand. They were expecting a conquering warrior king who would overthrow their oppressors; but this Jesus, and the kingdom he proclaims, were far from their expectations.

This contrast, between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar, is central to the story of Jesus, and central to early Christianity, for it led to his confrontation with the powers who ruled the world, and to his execution as an enemy of the state.

Even after the Romans took control in 63 BCE, Jerusalem was regarded as the centre of the Jewish world, its temple the special dwelling place of God, the only place where sacrifice – the only way to forgiveness – could take place.

Rome ruled through local collaborators – "*the chief priests, the elders and the scribes*" – and the wealthy, including Herod and his successors, and later through Roman governors, including Pontius Pilate. They operated a 'domination system' that ensured that more than half of the wealth from agricultural production went to them through taxation and exploitation. This arrangement was justified by religion. The people were told that the rulers were appointed by God, so what they said reflected the will of God. The collaborators got a free hand, provided they were loyal to Rome and paid the annual tribute.

The wealthy became richer, and the poor became ever worse off.

That's the background. The religious authorities needed to collaborate enough with Rome to keep out of trouble, but they also had to prevent any rebellion among the Jewish people, because that would lead to savage suppression by the Romans.

The message Jesus brought was seriously critical of the temple, and the collaboration of its officials with the Romans; critical of the whole domination system, and he proclaimed the forgiveness of God outside of the Temple system of sacrifice. He was heading for trouble.

That enthusiastic welcome into Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday is the beginning of a tumultuous week in which Jesus quickly wears out his welcome. The Gospels tell us that, on Monday, he disrupts the Temple operations, and challenges the religious establishment. On Tuesday, another major confrontation with the temple authorities and their associates. On Wednesday, a woman anoints him with expensive ointment, and one of his followers arranges to betray him. On Thursday he shares a final meal with his friends, he prays for deliverance in Gethsemane, he is betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, arrested, interrogated and condemned to death. On Friday he is abused, beaten up, barbarously executed, and hastily laid in a borrowed tomb, just in time for the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath.

Crucifixion was reserved for persistently defiant slaves and others who defied Roman rule. Jesus's execution was a public statement: this is what we do to people who oppose us.

Of course, we know that this was not the end, only the beginning. Jesus's followers continued to experience him after his death, and to know him as a figure of the present, not just a figure of the past. They continue to experience him as a divine reality, at one with God. Jesus was executed by Rome, by the domination system, but he was vindicated by God.

Luke tells us: *'be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.'* (Acts 2: 36; NIV)

Remember: Jesus was a Jew, committed to the Jewish religion. His conflict was not with Judaism, or with the Jewish people. He objected to the abuse of religion to justify a system of injustice, and to the temple authorities who collaborated with the oppressors, not to the Jewish people as a whole.

Nor was he concerned about the **kingdom** of God:

he was concerned about the kingdom of **God**.

Jesus came, not to start a new religion, but to reform the existing religion.

Christians regard Lent as a journey with Jesus to Jerusalem. The journey of Lent and Holy Week is about an alternative journey, and an alternative procession; about choosing between two ways and two processions.

Jesus himself talks about the broad gate and road, and the narrow gate and road.

The easy way of following the crowd, through a life of self-interest, easy standards, questionable morals, the 'how much can I get out of life' attitude;

or the *'Love God with all your heart, and soul and mind, and your neighbour as yourself'* way, the more demanding, but ultimately the more satisfying way of Christ. (Matthew 22:37-39 NCV)

As we enter Holy Week, as again we remember Jesus's last week, we are faced with two questions:

Which journey are we on?

Which procession are we in?

Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

Hymn 365 Ride on Ride On

Prayer for Others and Blessing

Loving God,

We pray to you for the world and for its needs.

We pray for people everywhere who are in any way affected by the Covid Pandemic: those suffering from this awful disease, all who nurse them and treat them; those, distanced by control measures, helplessly watching, waiting, worrying; all who have lost loved ones.

We pray for those who, in the true meaning of compassion, suffer alongside someone else who is in pain or distress.

When there are no words, and nothing to do to help, may they know the value of just being present.

We pray for our governments in Westminster and in Edinburgh, and for all who make decisions on our behalf: medical staff, scientists, advisers.

Grant, we pray, wisdom, understanding, guidance.

We pray also for those in power who do not take responsibility for their actions; who knowingly allow, or incite others, to injustice and violence; all those who, who from fear or self-interest, oppose change, new ways, new ideas. May the power of your love open them to the needs of others.

We pray for all those who face discrimination and injustice; women throughout the world whose gifts go unrecognised; all those who are considered second-class citizens.

We pray for people who are led astray by others, or by their own self-righteousness, or moved by misguided ideologies that impose a culture of injustice and oppression.

In quietness we bring our prayers for those known to us who are ill, in pain, in suffering, grief, or distress of any kind.

Pause

May this story of Holy Week sustain them, and us, and bring to us all comfort, companionship and hope. In Jesus 'name we ask. Amen.

Go now into Holy Week; stay safe in the way of Christ, and, walking with him, may you open yourself to his transforming love that Easter light may be born in you.

Now may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you, and remain with you, now and evermore. Amen.