

# Worship @ Home

## PALM SUNDAY

Christchurch – March 28<sup>th</sup> 2021



**Leader: Revd Val Reid**

**Reader: Emily Smith**

**Music: Steve Cook, Mandy Pye, Mike Crowley**

**Technology: Tony Edmonds**

**'Prepare ye the way of the Lord' – but which way?????**

*Please bring a twig with buds or leaves or blossom to the service...*

### Call to worship

O give thanks to the Lord for He is good

His steadfast love endures forever.

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

Psalm 118

**'Prepare ye the Way of the Lord' (Mandy and Mike)**

### Welcome

A warm welcome to worship on this Palm Sunday.

We should be outside, marching through the streets, waving palm branches, and shouting 'Hosanna!'.

But we are still in Lockdown, so we are still at home.

Tomorrow, six of us could meet in a garden.

But that wouldn't exactly conjure up Palm Sunday.

Crowds and shouting seem a long way away and a long time ago.

But we still come to worship.

We still come to travel together into Jerusalem, on through Holy Week, to the cross.

We still hold fast to the hope of resurrection, although we don't yet know what it will look like, or what it might mean.

So you are welcome – wherever you are, and however you are feeling.

I imagine that on that first Palm Sunday there were people shouting in triumph, and people weeping with incomprehension.

I am sure that will be so this morning.

But you are here.

And you are not alone.

My name is Val Reid, and I'm the minister at Christchurch Hitchin and at Pirton.

Our reader this morning is Emily Smith.

'Prepare ye the Way of the Lord' was sung by Mandy Pye and Mike Crowley.

The music in the rest of the service will be played and sung by Steve and Caroline Cook.

And behind the scenes, Tony Edmonds is holding it all together.

Let us pray

### Opening Prayers

The gates of Holy Week are open,  
and we are here to celebrate our King who rides a donkey.

Lord of all, when Jesus entered into Jerusalem,  
the people welcomed him with praise  
and gave him the best they could offer.

As we prepare to worship, we ask you to fill our hearts with joy and love.  
Help us to understand what it means  
to give freely and extravagantly of our time, our treasure and our talents.  
Most of all, inspire us to give you our praise.  
Amen

### Music – Make way, make way for Christ the King (StF 264)

Make way, make way  
For Christ the King  
In splendour arrives  
Fling wide the gates and welcome Him  
Into your lives

*Make way! (Make way!)*  
*Make way! (Make way!)*  
*For the King of kings*  
*(For the King of kings)*  
*Make way! (Make way!)*  
*Make way! (Make way!)*  
*And let His kingdom in*

He comes the broken hearts to heal  
The prisoners to free  
The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance  
The blind shall see  
*Make way! (Make way!)...*

And those who mourn with heavy hearts  
Who weep and sigh

With laughter, joy and royal crown  
He'll beautify  
*Make way! (Make way!)...*

We call you now to worship Him  
As Lord of all  
To have no gods before Him  
Their thrones must fall!  
*Make way! (Make way!)...*

Graham Kendrick

**And now over to Emily, for our reading from Mark's gospel**

**Mark 11:1-11**

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.

**Prayer of confession**

*You are invited to take your twig with buds or leaves or blossom, and hold it in your hands.*

*Hosanna!*

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

*I invite you to hold up your twig.*

*You might want to wave it in the air.*

*You might want to look closely at the beauty of the buds, the leaves, the blossom.*

With the crowds shouting Hosanna, we want to celebrate.  
To praise the God who made such beauty.

The God who seems to answer all our prayers.

The God who seems to fulfil all our hopes.

But the crowds who are shouting 'hosanna' today, will be shouting 'crucify' in a few days' time.

If our hope is in a God who seems to give us what we ask for,

What happens to faith when things go wrong?

What happens to faith in a pandemic?

What happens to faith a year on from that first lockdown?

I invite you to take your twig.

As you recognise the times when your faith has been too risk-averse, too simplistic, too selfish, you are invited to tear off a bud, a leaf, a blossom.

Our actions – and our lack of action –

Our words – and our silences –

Can cause damage,

Can stifle the possibilities for life and growth

In others

And in ourselves.

For the times when we have been unwilling to take the risk of following the master's' instructions...

Lord have mercy.

For the times when we have shouted Hosanna without counting the cost...

Lord have mercy.

For the times when we have made our faith conditional on God's good behaviour...

Lord have mercy.

For the times when we have been reluctant to throw down our coats on the road, because it felt that too much was being asked of us...

Lord have mercy.

For the times when we have gone with the flow, followed the crowd, and failed to take a stand...

Lord have mercy.

I invite you to look again at the twig you are holding.

Can you see the places where new life has been torn off and thrown away?

But can you also see the places where bud and blossom and leaf are still growing?

Lord we thank you for fresh starts,

For clean slates,

For the opportunities to learn and grow,

Despite our past mistakes.

Thank you that you offer us life,

Endless opportunities for life.  
Give us the courage to take them.  
Amen.

## Reflection

'I am not who I was...'  
*Michael Rosen 'Many different kinds of love' page 160*

Michael Rosen's book 'Many different kinds of love' was published last week. In it he charts the journey of the last year, from catching COVID, to getting rushed to hospital at the last minute thanks to a GP neighbour who realised how ill he was, to the time he spent in an induced coma, oblivious to the rest of the world. He has survived. But he is not the same. There are physical things – a damaged eye and an ear that doesn't work properly. But there are profound spiritual things too. He is a man who has been very close to death. And lived to tell the tale.

There was also a TV documentary this week about Kate Garraway, and her husband Derek Draper. He too has been deeply affected by COVID. He's been in hospital for a year, spending many months in a medically-induced coma. His wife was told that he had probably suffered significant cognitive damage. Might he be so changed that he was no longer the man she knew? What might that do to her relationship? A friend told her that nobody would blame her if they split up – she hadn't signed up for this. Kate Garraway was horrified. Perhaps I'll fall in love with him all over again in a different way, she said hopefully.

What does it do to us, to our relationships, to our lives, when people change?

Palm Sunday is a watershed moment in Jesus' ministry. Mark, in his gospel, has prepared us for this carefully. On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus has three times told them what being Messiah means. He has said that he will be betrayed, and killed, and three days later will rise again.

The first time Peter begins to rebuke him. This is not the kind of Messiah he has committed his life to.

The second time, the disciples start arguing with each other about who is the greatest.

The third time, James and John come up to him with a special request: can we sit on your right and your left in your glory?

They have their own view of who Jesus is.

They have seen him healing the sick, feeding thousands, calming storms.

They have seen huge crowds hanging on his every word.

And on this day, they have seen him riding into Jerusalem, cloaks spread on the road, leafy branches waved, shouts of hosanna.

A carefully stage-managed bit of street theatre, reminding the people of past coronations, past victories, past promises.

The last thing Jesus does before he enters the city is to heal a blind beggar.

Bartimaeus calls him out of the crowd, 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!'

His full, Messianic title.

Son of David.

And a miraculous healing as if to confirm this role.

No wonder they are tempted to think of him as a King coming in glory.

And to be bickering about who gets the best seats in the kingdom.

But Jesus is deliberately subverting their image of him.

He is riding a colt, not a mighty war horse.

He goes up to the temple – surely this will be the culmination of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem?

But Mark tells us that when he had looked around at everything, he went back out to Bethany with the twelve.

What an anti-climax.

As the week goes on, the disciples are challenged to re-think everything they thought they knew about the rabbi they had followed for three years.

Can he really be the Messiah if he can be betrayed?

Arrested?

Tortured?

Killed?

Will they be able to fall in love with him all over again in a different way?

I think this day has something profound to say to us in our current situation.

Tomorrow we enter a new stage of the road map out of lockdown.

Six people can meet in a garden.

Apparently online stores and garden centres have sold out of garden furniture, barbecues and fire pits, as people prepare for their new freedoms.

After Easter we will begin livestreaming our Sunday services from the sanctuary once more.

And at the end of April, we hope to re-start on-premises worship again.

But it will be different.

We will still be two metres apart.

We will still be wearing face masks.  
We won't be singing anytime soon.

Will it still be worship if we can't sing?  
If we can't share a coffee and a chat with our dear friends afterwards?

This week the Scottish Court of Sessions ruled that it was wrong to criminalise meeting for on-premises worship because of COVID.  
The right to worship freely trumped the need to limit the spread of the virus.  
And for the judges, online worship didn't count as worship.

Now we will all have our different views about this judgement.  
And whether 27 church leaders were right to ask for a judicial review on this matter.  
Decisions about whether to meet on-premises or not are never simple.  
Churches have wrestled with this – our trustees have wrestled with this – over and over again.

But I think I want to challenge the idea that online worship doesn't count as worship.

At the church meeting last week, we talked about our experience of worship over the last year.  
What have we missed?  
What have we learned?  
What is going to be important about the way we do worship in the future?

As Julie wrote in Weekly, we've missed the energy that comes from being together.  
We've learned that we can be flexible.  
Perhaps in the past we have got too hung up on rotas and formalities and getting it right.  
We've learned that things can change far more than we ever thought possible, or ever wanted, and yet we are still here.  
We are still worshipping together.  
Just differently.

I think that in our new, post-COVID world, we will have to learn to sit lightly to all our old assumptions.  
I think we will have to learn that what we thought was a given, might not be.  
That our understanding is, at best, partial.  
That God is calling us into new ways of being church.

But the thing is, although the experience of COVID changed Michael Rosen.  
And changed Derek Draper.  
Changed their understanding of who they were.  
Their relationships.  
And their lives.  
Palm Sunday isn't quite the same.

Jesus didn't change.

God didn't change.

For the disciples, the events of Palm Sunday and Holy Week meant that they were challenged to see Jesus differently.

Their perceptions changed.

Their understanding of what God might be and do changed.

And as a result, they too were changed.

All sorts of things will be different to how they have been in the past.

And to how we imagined they might be in the future.

And if we are faithful to our calling, we may be changed too – more than we thought possible.

But whatever the future looks like – in the church, in the world, in our own lives – we are still travelling with the one who has promised to be with us to the end of the age.

And whose love is faithful.

Amen.

**Prayer (URC Handbook):** The one who comes in the name of the Lord

**Music (StF 662) – Have you heard God's voice?**

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve

Though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow?*

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you use your voice: will you not sit down

When the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground

When the crowds are turning violent?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much...*

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,

will you share your faith with the faithless?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much...*

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
and believe it could be different?  
Will you share your views using words of grace?  
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*We will walk the path that will cost us much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow.  
We will trust in One who entrusts to us  
the disciples of tomorrow.*

*Jacqueline G Jones*

### **Prayers for ourselves and Others**

I know that we pray for each other.

We pray especially for those we know who are facing tough times.

We know that God is very near to those who need him, even if we are not able to name them in prayer.  
And we know that week by week, although it doesn't happen publicly on You Tube, Christine and Mandy are praying for the Christchurch community by name.

*And so we pray now for our world, for those we know and those we don't know.*

*The response to our prayers is:*

Praise the Lord: **Hosanna.**

#### **Slide 1**

We praise and thank you for the progress that has been made in the Covid vaccination programme, and we pray for those in our health services who have been put under additional pressure as a result of the pandemic; for those preparing for a third wave; and those working in care homes.

Praise the Lord:

**Hosanna.**

#### **Slide 2**

We praise and thank you for the churches that have been able to reopen for worship, and for creative ways which have been found to unite people in prayer and worship. We pray for those who feel isolated; who long to gather with others; who cannot access online worship.

Praise the Lord:

**Hosanna.**

#### **Slide 3**

We praise and thank you for signs of spring; for crocuses and daffodils, and all the green shoots of growth. We pray for gardeners; for those who look after parks and public verges; for those who keep our streets clean and make our communities more pleasant.

Praise the Lord:

**Hosanna.**

#### Slide 4

We praise and thank you for the message of hope, encouragement and peace that Jesus brings. We pray for those who are fearful for the future, those who have lost direction in life and those whose lives are troubled. We especially pray for...

Praise the Lord:

**Hosanna.**

#### Slide 5

Lord Jesus, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord –  
blessed for all you are; blessed for all you do.

Receive our prayers and speak to the needs of all your children, we pray.

**Amen.**

#### **Lord's prayer**

*I invite you now to say the Lord's prayer out loud.*

*Use whichever version you are familiar with.*

*Use whichever language feels like your mother tongue.*

*Although we are apart, we join together in praying the prayer that Jesus gave us.*

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.

#### **Blessing**

Let us go with him in faith and love  
So that, united with him in his sufferings  
We may share his risen life.  
Amen.

**Music (StF 293) All Heaven declares**

All heaven declares  
The glory of the risen Lord  
Who can compare with  
The beauty of the Lord  
Forever He will be  
The Lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow the knee  
And worship Him alone.

I will proclaim  
The glory of the risen Lord  
Who once was slain  
To reconcile us to God  
Forever You will be  
The Lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow the knee  
And worship You alone.

*Noel Richards and Tricia Richards*

*Prayers are taken from the URC Prayer Handbook 2021: Conversations.*

*Intercessions are taken from Roots for Churches 28.2.21*

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