

## **Dorset South & West Circuit Written Service for 28 March 2021 by Revd Brenda Stephenson**

**Welcome** to worship today, Palm Sunday. We begin with that story before moving into part of the passion story.

Call to worship      May God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
From the Temple of the Lord we bless you.  
The Lord is God; he has been good to us.  
With branches in your hands, start the festival  
and march around the altar.  
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
and his love endures for ever. (Verses from Ps 118)

Prayer                      Great God of love, we meet here today to remember and give thanks  
for that expression of your love that we meet in Jesus,  
especially in the final days of his life here on earth.  
So we ask for the help of your Spirit:  
that we may travel in imagination with Jesus;  
that we may find here whatever we need now to live as your people;  
that this may be the true worship of mind and heart.  
We offer this prayer in his name  
and with the words of the prayer he taught us to pray together:  
Our Father.....

Hymn                      Ride on, ride on in majesty,  
hark all the tribes "Hosanna!" cry;  
your humble beast pursues the road  
with palms and scattered garments strowed.

Ride on, ride on in majesty,  
in lowly pomp ride on to die;  
O Christ, your triumphs now begin  
o'er captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on, ride on in majesty,  
your 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 your meek head to mortal pain,  
then take, O God, your power, and reign.

Henry Milman

Introduction We have begun our journey on Palm Sunday, coming into Jerusalem. Travel in your imaginations with Jesus and his followers. You have crested the hill and Jerusalem lies before you. You have travelled for some days to get here and celebrate Passover, the great festival that celebrates your people's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. There is a festival atmosphere. Now you are so near you find you are looking forward to feasting, praying, singing and seeing old friends. Yet something else is starting to happen now. A donkey has been brought to the head of the column and someone is getting on it. Some of the men near the front are putting their cloaks on the road, others are cutting branches from the trees to do the same. There are cries of "Hosanna. Welcome to the Kingdom of our Father David." Has it arrived then, this kingdom? There are cries of Hosanna – praising God and crying out for his help at the same time. What is going to happen now? What will the man on the donkey do? The answer is Nothing.

It's especially true of Mark's gospel, that in spite of the crying aloud and the singing and the waving of branches this is a very low key event. It's a lot of noise and enthusiasm on one of the routes leading into Jerusalem and then nothing particular happens. We're told Jesus goes and looks around the temple and then heads off into the night. How strange!

*(before each reading we will use these words from Taize to sing several time or repeat verbally as you remember you are walking the way of the cross with Jesus. Repeat them as many times as you like. )*

Taize Chant            Stay with me, remain here with me,  
                                 Watch and pray, watch and pray.     (repeated)

Reading                Mark 15:1-15

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Comment              That reading and the next one together include six repetitions of the phrase King of the Jews. This is the charge against Jesus - claiming to be the King of the Jews. Only a charge of this kind - of political insurrection - would have held water for Pilate. He wasn't interested in religious beliefs or blasphemy. Those were not a threat of any kind to Rome and its power. But Pilate asks Jesus: "Are you the King of the Jews?" he gets no real answer. Basically Jesus remains silent, willing to undergo suffering for the kingdom. Focus is shifting from Israel and the kingdom of our Father David to a different kingdom, the kingdom of God himself. Mark's account of what happened is so spare compared with the other gospels. Yet it says all that needs to be said.

Taize Chant            Stay with me, remain here with me,  
                                 Watch and pray, watch and pray.     (repeated)

Reading                Mark 15:16-32

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters; and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the

Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

**Comment** First the soldiers mock him – dressing him up like a pretend king and bowing before him. No doubt this is something some had always wanted to do – to put this difficult people with its own particular religion in its place. Yet for believers down the centuries their mocking is also a testimony to who Jesus is. So is the placard nailed to the cross with its sarcastic words – the King of the Jews. Indeed! And there's the taunt of the chief priests and scribes – we'd believe if this King of Israel would actually prove it by coming down from the cross. That's the very thing he cannot do. Love keeps him there; love for God and for the whole world. This becomes his reign. The Kingdom *is* here. Darkness is about to descend. And, if total eclipses are anything to go by, deep silence. It is broken by Jesus' final cry of seeming abandonment – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Had he?

**Taize Chant** Stay with me, remain here with me,  
Watch and pray, watch and pray. (repeated)

**Reading** Mark 15:33-41  
When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

**Hymn** My song is love unknown  
my Saviour's love for me,  
love to the loveless shown  
that they might lovely be.  
O who am I,  
that for my sake  
my Lord should take  
frail flesh and die?

Sometimes they strew his way  
and his sweet praises sing;  
resounding all the day  
hosannas to their King.  
Then "Crucify!"  
is all their breath,  
and for his death  
they thirst and cry.

They rise, and needs will have  
my dear Lord's made away;  
a murderer they save,  
the Prince of Life they slay.  
Yet cheerful he  
to suffering goes,  
that he his foes  
from thence might free.

Here might I stay and sing  
no story so divine.  
Never was love, dear King,  
never was grief like thine!  
This is my Friend,  
in whose sweet praise  
I, all my days,  
could gladly spend.  
Samuel Crossman

Final comment Jesus' final cry recorded by Mark is **My God, my God** why have you forsaken me? In spite of everything, his dreadful suffering, his impending death, it is still to his Father that he calls. God is still real though it must have been impossible to feel that at such a moment.

Through these readings we have noted the focus on King and Kingdom – the King of the Jews and the Kingdom of God. Also the quiet, the silence, the low key. God does not need to assert himself, prove he is right or crush those who work against him. Love doesn't work like that. Remember too a couple of Jesus' stories – the Kingdom is like a tiny seed, it is like yeast, so inconspicuous yet having the desired result. So don't be surprised there's no fanfare of royal trumpets now or in three days' time. Don't expect his love to flatten your enemies or shout from the rooftops what you need to do. The Spirit blows where she wills. Look and listen hard to catch sight or sound of what God is doing in your part of the world. Then join in. However it feels, he never abandons those who respond to his love.

Offering and prayers Father God whom we meet in Jesus Christ, we bring you our gifts and prayers. Use us, our money, our time, whatever we can do for you, use them so that we and our world become closer to places where you reign.

We pray for places of conflict.....for your peace.  
We pray for places of dis-ease.....for your healing.  
We pray for people of influence.....for your wisdom.  
We pray for the earth.....for better human love and understanding.  
We pray for building back better.....for courage.  
We pray for people we love and are concerned about.....for your presence.  
Bless us and those for whom we pray, we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Hymn

When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of Glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,  
sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,  
spreads o'er his body on the tree;  
then am I dead to all the globe,  
and all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were an offering far too small;  
love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Isaac Watts

Blessing

As you travel with Jesus may you know the blessing of the Father's love through this coming week and far beyond. Amen.