

DSW Circuit Written Service for Palm Sunday prepared by Rev Helen Harrell

Lenten Cross Liturgy

Our symbol today can be nothing other than a palm branch representing Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. This was both extravagant and symbolic as he rode into the Holy City. He was witnessed by crowds waving branches and shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David!" as if in fulfilment of a Messianic expectation. Yet if they had looked closely they would have seen he rode a simple donkey, carried no arms and was followed by men, women and children rather than an army. Messiah most certainly – but this Son of David was a rather different Anointed One of God!

StF 265 vs 1:

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

Prayer: Lord of majesty and awesomeness, lay upon us the Spirit of humility and the blessed wisdom of turning the other cheek in the face of provocation and violence. Amen.

StF 263 Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!

Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Lord, we lift up your name, with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord, my God!
Hosanna in the highest!

Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Lord, we lift up your name, with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord, my God!
Glory to the King of Kings!

Carl Tuttle (b. 1953)

Prayer of adoration

God of steadfast love, we give you thanks. Your love does not fade; its strength endures, stretching out across history, beyond time and space. Such love we cannot grasp; we can only marvel at a love so big. We thank you for your great love. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we confess that we are often creatures of the crowd; swayed by the herd, we move this way and that, too fearful of standing out. In this age of fake news and misinformation, we allow ourselves to believe what we want to believe, just as those in Jerusalem did, shouting for Jesus' blood. Forgive us, Lord, if we do not bear Christian witness in our own troubled times. As we remember Christ's journey to the cross, we recommit ourselves to standing up for Jesus, the King who deigned to empty himself in humility, and to give himself up to death for us. **Amen.**

Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11

¹As Jesus and his followers were coming closer to Jerusalem, they stopped at Bethphage at the hill called the Mount of Olives. From there Jesus sent two of his followers ²and said to them, "Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it, you will quickly find a donkey tied there with its colt. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone asks you why you are taking the donkeys, say that the Master needs them, and he will send them at once." ⁴This was to bring about what the prophet had said:

⁵ “Tell the people of Jerusalem,
‘Your king is coming to you.
He is gentle and riding on a donkey,
on the colt of a donkey.’”

⁶ The followers went and did what Jesus told them to do. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus and laid their coats on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸ Many people spread their coats on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The people were walking ahead of Jesus and behind him, shouting, “Praise to the Son of David! God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise to God in heaven!” ¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, all the city was filled with excitement. The people asked, “Who is this man?” ¹¹ The crowd said, “This man is Jesus, the prophet from the town of Nazareth in Galilee.”

StF 262: All glory, laud and honour

All glory, laud and honour
to thee Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring!
Thou art the king of Israel,
thou David’s royal Son,
who in the Lord’s name comest,
the King and Blessed one.

To thee before thy Passion
they sang their hymns of praise;
to thee now high exalted
Our melody we raise.
Thou didst accept their praises;
accept the prayer we bring,
who in all good delightest,
thou good and gracious King.

The company of angels
are praising thee on high,
and mortal men and all things
created make reply.
The people of the Hebrews
with palms before thee went;
our praise and prayer and anthems
before thee we present.

All glory, laud and honour
to thee Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring!

*St Theodulph of Orleans (d.821)
translated by John Mason Neale (1811-1866)*

Reflection

It's an old familiar story - the story of Jesus riding in triumph on a donkey into the city of Jerusalem.

We don't know if Jesus had made prior arrangement with the donkey's owner before sending two of his disciples to fetch the donkey, but it was there, ready and waiting, just as Jesus had said. Neither do we know which two disciples were sent, but imagine how those disciples felt as they walked up to the village. I wonder what their conversation was? Did they argue about who was going to do the untying? Did they discuss what to say if accused of stealing? The disciples might have felt very confused about their mission. They may have wondered what on earth Jesus wanted with a donkey and what he was planning next. Whatever they felt about the situation, they went ahead, in faith and obedience to do as Jesus had told them. And it seems that everything was all right. Yes - they were questioned about what they were doing, but no one tried to stop them. Once the donkey had been collected, Jesus rode it into Jerusalem – a sign that he came in peace – to be greeted by large crowds. The people had been living under Roman occupation for years, suffering oppression and hardship. They were looking for a new leader, a political ruler, who would put an end to the tyranny and injustice. They hoped Jesus was going to save them. They laid cloaks and branches on the ground in his path, thus forming a carpet. It was a mark of recognition and respect, just as a red carpet is rolled out in today's society for VIPs. They greeted Jesus with cheers. 'Hosanna!' they cried, which means “God save us.”

And God answered their cry because Jesus was riding into Jerusalem to meet with his death, enabling salvation to be offered to all those who were willing to accept it. What they didn't realise that salvation couldn't be won by them standing at the side of the road. The people in the crowd, metaphorically speaking, had to follow the path that Jesus took to the cross. They had to humble themselves as Jesus had done. They had to put away all pride and die to self. And so must we if we want to find salvation in Jesus. How are you going to respond to God this Easter? Perhaps, as you have been preparing yourself in this season of Lent, God has been calling you to something new. Are you ready and waiting as the donkey was? And when the right time comes, will you go willingly? Even if, like the disciples, you don't fully understand what it is God wants you to do - will you go anyway, in faithful obedience, putting aside your anxieties? Will you speak with the authority that has been given to you through Jesus and trust him for the outcome? Finally, are you willing to count the cost? If we engage in the Lord's work, as many of us know from experience, there are going to be times when we face difficulty, struggles and even opposition. Perhaps you feel you've got nothing to offer. But let me leave you with a word of encouragement. Something that was said once at a fellowship group I used to attend, "If God can use a donkey, then there's hope for us all!"

Prayers *(The prayers that follow take us through the events of Holy Week)*

Jesus, the candles shone brightly on Palm Sunday. This was a day of festival of welcome. Only you knew that the truth lay elsewhere. Jesus, hold us in your truth.

You taught passionately in the temple, offering the word of life, but you were hemmed in by the small-minded leaders of the people with their petty arguments about marriages in heaven and paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus, save us from triviality.

You accepted the loving touch and anointing of a wise and wounded woman, but there were none thereafter who would care for your body. Only those who would hurt it. Jesus, make us compassionated in all our ways.

You had supper with friends and even gave Judas the seat of honour, but he it was who slipped out into the night and finished supper with the devil. Jesus, save us from delusion and deceit.

You hugged the ground in Gethsemane in an agony of faith and doubt, but your three best friends left you to it. While the future of the world was in the balance, they fell asleep. Jesus, keep us loyal and true in all our relationships.

Peter and John followed you to the High Priest's house, and there by the charcoal fire Peter denied he'd ever met you. Peter – who had sworn an hour earlier that he was yours forever. Jesus, give us courage to hold the faith under pressure.

You were whipped half to death, humiliated before the crowd, friendless in a world of power and corruption. And then you heard the people's piercing cry: "Crucify him!" Jesus, keep us from foolishly following the crowd.

You hung on that fierce cross, tortured within and without. The world you came to save had turned against you, and even heaven itself stayed silent in the darkest mystery of all. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus, please save us from despair.

And so came the end. You had drunk the dark wine of suffering to the dregs. There was nothing more to give, no more light to shine. "It is finished." The light of the world had gone out.

Lord of our stricken world, there is nothing we can do to redeem our blindness in sending you to your death. You only can redeem. But keep us in touch with the pain of the world, where you are still hung out to die, and

there may we ease you from the cross, tend your wounds, and offer you the friendship we failed to give on a green hill far away. This we ask in sadness and hope, for your sake and for ours. Amen

The Lord's Prayer: *pray the words of the Lord's Prayer in which ever form is most familiar to you.*

StF 277: My song is love unknown.

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

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

He came from his blest throne,
salvation to bestow;
but they made strange, and none
the longed-for Christ would know.
But O my Friend,
my Friend indeed,
who at my need
his life did spend.

In life no house, no home,
my Lord on earth might have;
in death, no friendly tomb
but what a stranger gave.
What may I say?
Heaven was his home;
but mine the tomb
Wherein he lay.

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.

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.

Why, what has my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
he gave the blind their sight.
Sweet injuries!
Yet they at these
themselves displease,
and 'gainst him rise.

Samuel Crossman (c. 1624-1683)

Blessing

Lord, as we go with you into this Holy Week, hold us close, help us to be faithful to you as we know you are always faithful to us. As we journey to the cross, help us to be able to say like the centurion. 'Truly this is God's Son'. And the blessing of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and those you love, today and always. **Amen.**