

Palm Sunday Service – produced for radio, April 2014

Dave Kitchen

Hello and welcome to Cyncoed Methodist Church, in Cardiff, on this Palm Sunday as we remember how Jesus entered Jerusalem at the start of the week that ended with his trial and execution. It's a strange Sunday in some ways because we're reading about people who were thrilled and delighted to welcome Jesus into their midst and who seem to have had no idea about how everything would change within a few days. But, before we think about the storm clouds that gathered, let's praise God as people have in every generation and did on that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

Jesus is lord, creation's voice proclaims it

Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,
For by His power each tree and flower was planned and made.
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it;
sun, moon and stars in heaven cry: Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!

Praise Him with 'Hallelujahs', for Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Yet from His throne eternal
in flesh He came to die in pain on Calvary's tree.
Jesus is Lord! From Him all life proceeding,
yet gave His life a ransom thus setting us free.

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!

Praise Him with 'Hallelujahs', for Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
from death He rose and all His foes shall own His name.
Jesus is Lord! God sends His Holy Spirit
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!

Praise Him with 'Hallelujahs', for Jesus is Lord!

DK

Each one of the four gospel writers tells the story of Palm Sunday in their own way. Here is how Matthew records it in chapter eleven.

Fran Smallcombe

As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives.

There Jesus sent two of the disciples on ahead with these instructions: "Go to the village there ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied up with her colt beside her. Untie them and bring them to me. And if anyone says anything, tell him, 'The Master needs them'; and then he will let them go at once."

This happened in order to make what the prophet had said come true: "Tell the city of Zion: look, your king is coming to you! He is humble and rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

So the disciples went and did what Jesus had told them to do: they brought the donkey and the colt, threw their cloaks over them, and Jesus got on.

A large crowd of people spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds walking in front of Jesus and those walking behind began to shout, "Praise to David's Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown into an uproar. "Who is he?" the people asked.

"This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee," the crowds answered.

(Matthew 21, v1-11)

DK

The buzz in the crowd jumps out of that reading for me but I'm not convinced they were looking all that closely at Jesus. They seem caught up in their own excitement. So I tried to imagine what someone who was actually watching the man at the centre of all this commotion might have noticed.

Megan Thomas

I spread your way with branches,
I called upon your name.
Amongst the crowds and shouting,
Unhurriedly you came.

I stopped a second, wondered:
You weren't like those around.
I wasn't sure you liked the fuss
Or even heard the sound.

You came in peace, unguarded;
We shouted for a king.
We loved you but weren't ready
For what you came to bring.

Prayers: DK

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, when we think of the crowds who welcomed you to Jerusalem, it makes our own support for you seem a bit half-hearted at times. We thank you for those whose enthusiasm wakes us up, for those who are full of the brightness and joy of their faith. May they challenge us to be hopeful and positive in all we set out to do in your name.

But we also know those crowds melted away as quickly as they appeared. What matters more than cheering crowds are people who stand firm when it becomes difficult or dangerous to do that. May we be steady and sure in our faith as well as keen and eager.

Forgive us when we fall short of what you hoped for in our lives and make us patient and merciful with those who fail us. We are not as forgiving or as understanding as we would like to be.

Renew your spirit within our hearts so we may be equally your followers on days of great celebration and in times of great troubles.

May our eyes be ready to see all that is lovely in your creation; may our hands and heart be ready to work hard in putting right all that has been damaged in our world.

As you have called us and loved us, we ask these things in your name. Amen

Link to hymn: DK

We sing perhaps the best known of the Palm Sunday hymns – Ride on, ride on in majesty

Ride on, ride on in majesty

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry;
Your humble beast pursues its 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!
The winged squadrons of the sky
look down with sad and wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.

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.

Intro to monologue DK

We heard Matthew's account of Christ's arrival in Jerusalem but what did it actually feel like if you were one of the disciples? Possibly a little like this.

Monologue: Roger Palmer

That last visit to Jerusalem started out so well. I couldn't quite believe how easy it was. We came as far as Bethphage on foot and collected a young donkey for Jesus. There was a plan you see. Everything fitted together.

And what a day it turned out to be! There was a slight breeze and a bright, blue sky. We laid our cloaks upon the animal and Jesus rode for the first time since we'd known him. It's no great distance from Bethphage to the city. But, in that journey, we gathered a crowd who kept telling everyone: "Jesus is coming – the one they called the Christ."

I think we all felt the same: celebrities at last. There was a saviour, as David had been, and we were his disciples. How could you not love that? We'd forgotten that he'd warned us of troubles to come and we missed altogether the reason he

rode a donkey. It was the animal which made clear he came in peace. It was also the creature that carried other people's burdens.

Jesus rode towards the city gate and the crowd began to cut down branches, shouting as if King David was returning. It doesn't get any better than that. The biggest party Jerusalem had seen for centuries and I was part of it.

When we got there, Jesus went, as we knew he would, to the Temple. He didn't stay there long but he looked at everything. And a shadow fell over him. I can only guess how he felt as we entered Jerusalem but I think I know what he thought as evening fell upon the Temple. So much that was right and beautiful...so much that was wrong and ugly.

I'm certain now that he understood in that moment how he would suffer for the ugliness. But all I could hear as I lay in bed that evening, were the echoes of all those Hosannas being sung to him.

ANTHEM Hosanna to the King of Kings

Hosanna to the king of kings, lift high your voice in praise and sing
He comes this day oh glorious day
Let your loud hosanna ring
Let the people shout, let the rocks cry out
He comes in the name of the Lord
Hosanna to the king of Kings
Sing Hosanna to the King

Lift up your heads O Mighty gates
Open wide you ancient doors
Open wide that the King of glory may come in
Let us worship and adore
Who is this King of Glory who comes in the name of the Lord.

He is the Lord Almighty! Sing hosanna to the King
Hosanna, Hosanna
We sing Hosanna Hosanna
Blessed is the one who comes today in the name of the Lord

Hosanna to the King of kings,
wave your palms and joyfully sing
See the King who comes on a donkeys colt
Let your loud Hosanna ring
Rejoice o people of Zion
He comes to set you free, he comes to set you free
Hosanna to the King of kings, Hosanna to the King of kings
Sing Hosanna to the King!

TALK:DK

My thanks to the Cathays Community choir for their voices. Very different to the “Hosanna” song we used to sing in Sunday School. In tune for one thing! Mind you, I loved going to Sunday School. I’m not sure why. My teacher was forever saying: “Remember that Jesus can see everything you’re doing.” Which terrified me because I had a seriously bad habit of sneaking off where I wasn’t supposed to go.

But I stuck with Sunday School and won attendance prizes year after year. What puzzled me as a seven year old was why some kids came for a week or two and then gave up. I didn’t really get why people turned up at all if they weren’t going to give it a chance for a few months.

So the Palm Sunday story was always something that seemed particularly odd to me as a youngster. You’ve got this incredible snapshot of excitement and hope. Then it disappears as fast as it arrives. One moment you have this party to beat all parties around Jesus. A few days later, people are screaming for his blood. What’s going on there?

You could just say that crowds are notoriously fickle. It didn’t take me long as I grew up to realise how quickly and how often parents, for example, change their mind. I think I assumed it was something that happened when they had children.

Confused by what they'd got themselves into, they kept changing their mind and trying different things.

That childish explanation of how adults work still seems to me to have a little bit of truth in it but I'm not sure it explains why Jesus had so much support one day and apparently so little when he really needed it. To understand that, I think you need to know a bit about the politics of his situation.

The very fact that Jesus rides into Jerusalem is dangerous. If he'd ridden through the gates of the city on a horse, it would have almost certainly have been seen as a military action and the occupying Roman army would have killed him there and then. Rebellions were crushed before they got going. That was government policy.

But he doesn't arrive like that. He's comes in peaceably: on a donkey and without a sword. The Romans, looking on, must have thought what an odd lot these Jews were with their strange ways of doing things, their religion and their history. The shouting about King David wouldn't have gone down too well, mind you. If there were to be any kings in this land it was up to the Romans to approve and appoint them. Herod knew all about that.

It's the fact that the crowd are shouting about a successor to King David that gives you the clue to what will happen in the next few days in Jerusalem. They're actually hoping, I think, that this man called the Christ is the one that will overthrow the Romans and also sort out the corruption at the top of their own religious hierarchy. It's going to be God with the people and for the people. That's what the excitement's about.

Jesus knows it isn't as straightforward as that. If you want the nation to be different, you have to be different first. The change begins in each individual and

grows from there. It's not something that someone else does for you while you're cheering from the side-lines. That's his challenge.

Even more radically, it's not about taking hold of the reins of power, it's about learning to serve others and being willing to suffer if necessary. If the crowds had read their history, particularly through the eyes of prophets like Isaiah and Zechariah, they would have known this. Sadly, we tend to read only the bits we want to read and see only what we want to see.

When I was a young teacher, I sold my smallish motorbike and bought a larger one so I could do longer journeys and be more comfortable on holiday trips. But the second-hand bike I bought had American handlebars and the pupils in school suddenly saw someone who looked like an extra from the set of the film Easy Rider. For a short while, they thought I'd turned into someone who was very cool and a bit edgy. A few dullish English lessons from me put that impression right. But it taught me how powerful an image is...also, how misleading it can be.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the tide of change seemed to be rushing in. Some of the religious leaders asked him to keep his people quiet as they approached the city.

"If they keep quiet," he replied, "the stones themselves will start shouting." It felt like an unstoppable moment. And the city fathers admitted it: "We're not getting anywhere," they complained, "the whole world is following him."

But it was just a moment, an event, a wonderful image. People wanted Jesus to follow their agenda rather than following him. They wanted a soldier not a servant. They wanted power more than they wanted prayer. So that's the challenge of Palm Sunday for me. If I want to do things my way I'm part of the crowd who simply don't get it. If I want to do things His way, then the world can truly be different.

HYMN: Make Way

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! for the King of kings!

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! for the King of kings!

And let his kingdom in!

And those who mourn with heavy hearts, who weep and sigh;

With laughter, joy and royal crown he'll beautify.

Make way! Make way! for the King of kings!

And let his kingdom in!

We call you now to worship him as Lord of all.

To have no other gods but him: their thrones must fall!

Make way! Make way! for the King of kings!

And let his kingdom in!

PRAYERS 2 Pamela John

Let us pray

Father,

We bring before you those who have been swept up in the emotion of an event or campaign without thinking about the implications of it - either for themselves or others. We pray for wisdom in the heat of the moment and calm in the midst of the clamour for quick solutions.

We pray also for those who cannot see what they can possibly do to help their situation. Make us kind and patient listeners to the troubles of others. And protect us from the temptation of providing glib advice or easy but unrealistic answers.

We remember, too, all who struggle with ill health or with grief. Be their strength, Lord, and their comfort in the darkest hours.

We pray especially for our world, blighted so often by war and by hunger. Give kindness and common sense in abundance to those whose lives are lived in the midst of the troubles of this planet.

Finally we pray we may be the hands that offer the practical action which makes a difference, even to the lives of just a few.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, whose life, death and resurrection makes all prayers possible. Amen

HYMN: 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.
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 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

Blessing

As we go our separate ways, we do so with God watching over us.

May the Lord bless and keep us, may he make his face to shine upon us and light up our lives with kindness; may he watch over us and give us peace.

We say the words of the grace together.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and always. Amen.

After the service: a prayer for 2020

It's striking how much is different six years on but also how many similarities there are.

Let us pray

Lord

When we worshipped together in 2014, we prayed about the dangers of being swept up in the emotion of an event. Well, we know all about that today and it's hard to cope with. Make us strong in your spirit.

We prayed for wisdom in the heat of the moment; we need that now in greater quantity than we have needed it for generations. Help us to be clear about what makes sense and what is needless panic.

We prayed back then for those we could not see. On this Palm Sunday, we remember the people who we long to be with but who we are isolated from. May we faithfully pray for each other and maintain contact in all the ways we still can do. We never tend to give you thanks for the blessings of technology but we do today.

We pray for all who are ill at this time and give thanks for all the staff who keep medical services running as they help and heal so many.

We pray as well for those who are afraid – and that includes us sometimes. May we hear you voice saying to us as you did to your first disciples: “Do not be afraid.”

These are difficult times, Lord Jesus, stay close.

Amen.