

Church at Home

Palm Sunday - 28th March 2021

'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.'

Psalm 118:26

And so, the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry arrives. It is such an important week that each of the gospels devotes many chapters to the events of the next days. Although Jesus had told lots of unforgettable parables, healed many people and taught crowds about the Kingdom of God, all this now becomes the overture for what Jesus is about to go through for the whole world. The news of those amazing stories and wonderful deeds assures Jesus of a hero's welcome into Jerusalem on the day we now call Palm Sunday. In the style of a victory procession for a Roman general, people lined the streets waving palms and throwing their clothes onto the road as a 'red carpet' for the new King. They shout out an extravagant welcome, believing that Jesus has come to rescue them from the Romans and set Israel and Judah free. Their words about peace and glory are almost an echo of what the angels sang the night Jesus was born but, just as the arrival of the King then as a helpless baby was unexpected, so the manner of his entry on this occasion took everyone by surprise too. He chose to come in on a donkey not a fine white stallion, which would have better suited a great king. This was in sharp contrast to Pilate and his soldiers who arrived about the same time from the other direction and through a different gate 'to police' the Passover. Even to the last, Jesus is trying to help everyone understand that he was going to be a different sort of king, but the crowds had already made up their minds; and even Jesus recognised that this is a day when there should be huge rejoicing, because an amazing rescue was about to happen, but one which these crowds on that first Palm Sunday could not begin to imagine.

The Bible readings for this Sunday:

[Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29](#) - These verses come from the last of a group of Psalms that are sung during the Passover Feast, which Jesus celebrated during this Holy Week. As Jesus sang them, he must have reflected on how both his triumphal entry on Palm Sunday is echoed in its words, as well as the rejection that he was about to experience on Good Friday. Nevertheless, it is a song that begins and ends with thanks for God's steadfast love.

[Mark 11: 1-11](#) - The preparation for Palm Sunday is recorded in as much detail as the event itself! We read of how the young donkey was ready for Jesus to borrow...which suggests how carefully planned Palm Sunday was. The excited crowds shout 'Hosanna', but Jesus is silent in the midst of it all. He is preparing himself for what has also been carefully planned from the beginning of time.

A prayer as we prepare to draw close to God

Loving Father,
as Christ entered into Jerusalem,
let him enter our lives;
let the King of glory come in,
that he may rule in our hearts;
and that we may offer our love and our lives to him;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,
who offered his life for us,
and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end. Amen
(from David Adam's 'Traces of Glory')



Entry into the city by John August Swanson

Suggested hymns:

[Make way, make way](#)

[All glory, laud and honour](#)

[Ride on, ride on in majesty](#)

[My song is love unknown](#)

[You are the King of glory](#)

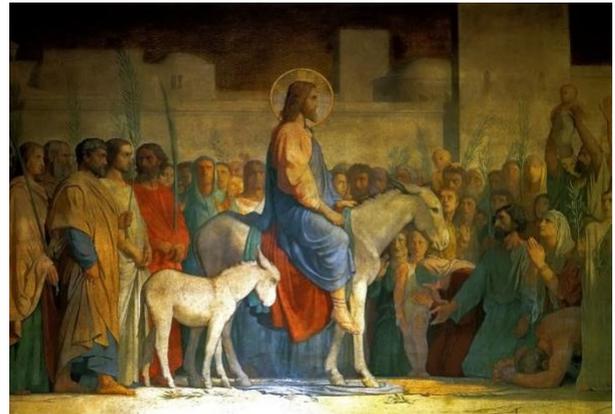
[How deep the Father's love for us](#)

[All hail King Jesus](#)



First thoughts on today's Gospel reading:

In many churches on this Sunday, the full story of Holy Week is read from one of the Gospels, preparing us for the dramatic and life-changing historical events that are remembered and celebrated every year by Christians around the world. Of course, God's rescue plan of salvation started way back at the beginning of time, yet during this week we intentionally stop to wonder at the depths of God's love for us in sending Jesus to deal with our great enemy death, and to remove the barrier of sin that has separated us from our Father in heaven. As we look back on a year of painful loss and bereavement because of the



Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin 1809-1864

pandemic, and we mourn all that we have had to give up or put on hold, we might be tempted to cry out to God that he has abandoned us and has not shown up when we needed him most. However Holy Week is one answer to that. God has stepped into the deepest, darkest places of our experience of human life, even death itself, and God has not abandoned us, but been there with us through all the pain, the heartache and the questions. The Holy Week story of betrayal, loss, innocent suffering, pain and bereavement is at the heart of our Christian faith and of who God is. Because we have a God who has stood with us in our brokenness, even experiencing abandonment on the cross, so we can be confident that God will bring us through to a new beginning. *I wonder which parts of the Holy Week story speak most powerfully to you at this time and help you make sense of life's tragedies and traumas?*

For our prayers, let us remember:

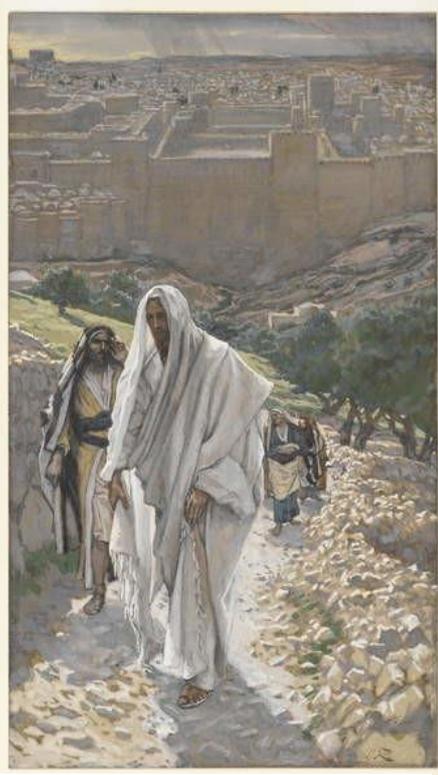
- Friends and family who may have felt abandoned this past year and who cry out to God in pain.
- Our Government and local leaders taking tough decisions around how to manage our emergence from lockdown.
- Our churches making plans to return to 'face-to-face' church this Eastertide; and for creative plans to tell the story of Easter in the village through special events and The Easter Trail
- Those we know who are sick, at home or in hospital; and those who support the care of elderly people in Nursing Homes
- Families struggling to care for children in war-torn and needy parts of our world.
- Particular items from the news that God has put on your heart this morning.

Add any other people and situations that The Holy Spirit brings to your mind as you have been praying and then say our family prayer, **The Lord's Prayer**.

End your time of church-at-home by saying out loud the words of **The Grace**, reaching out your hands to include in your imagination all those you know and love, who live here in the village and beyond.

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For further reflection



Jesus goes in the evening to Bethany by James Tissot

Holy Week takes us through a range of emotions in a story that still fascinates, challenges and disturbs all who take it seriously. After the events of Palm Sunday, the festival crowds in Jerusalem saw Jesus again, each day....sometimes teaching near the Temple and at other times walking the streets, where he was closely watched by an increasingly nervous Sanhedrin and the Roman peace-keeping forces. However, the evenings and early mornings were spent elsewhere, at least until the Thursday of that week. Each evening before sunset Jesus walked back from the capital to stay with the sisters Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus at Bethany. How welcoming the quiet of an ordinary home must have been during this momentous week.

Try to imagine how the siblings in this family felt about the growing unease that they sensed as they asked Jesus about the day and what had happened; and how they reacted as they slowly realised that this week wasn't going to end on a throne but a cross.

And try putting yourself into the shoes of Jesus too, as he woke each morning in the village and could so easily have decided not to return to the bustling streets of Jerusalem.

Perhaps this short **poem** will help your reflections:

The Choice

The sun rose bright on Olivet.
It would have been easy to stay.
The birdsong was sweet in Bethany.
Why would anyone leave that day?

The children were laughing and playing.
Why should he wave them goodbye?
The sisters were willing to save him,
So why go to the city to die?

But the pain of the universe called him.
The cries of all the enslaved.
All time and history was waiting.
There was no other way to be saved.

And the darkness would fall on the city.
And the shadows touch Bethany too,
Before a new day could dawn for all people,
For the children, the sisters, and you.

And it was at Bethany that Mary chose to anoint Jesus ahead of his burial. She was perhaps the only one of his followers who realised what had to happen at the end of that week; and maybe her act of service and devotion inspired Jesus himself, who on the Thursday evening chose to wash his disciples' feet in the upper room.

We need a better, stronger word

to describe God's love,

Jesus is that Word



Mary by Daniel F. Gerhartz

For further reflection and activities for the whole family

[Here](#) is an animation of Holy Week

[Here](#) is a short animation of Palm Sunday

[Here](#) is a reflective version of the story with wooden figures and wondering questions

[Palm Sunday Song](#) with words

A focus for today's story:

Find a branch with large leaves to be your 'palms' for this story. You might even be able to find a real palm leaf somewhere or perhaps a cross made from palm leaves.

Questions to talk about together:

I wonder...

- what makes you think that Jesus had planned ahead for this special day?
- what was so special about this particular donkey?
- why such large crowds had gathered to welcome Jesus?
- what sort of king everyone was expecting?
- why the religious leaders were so upset?

Activity idea - Make your own Easter garden

You will need:

a tray, soil, grass seeds or moss, small stones, a large stone, a small piece of white cloth, a small flower pot, 6 sticks to make into 3 crosses, string

- Place your flower pot on its side on the tray (this will be the tomb) and cover half the tray (including over the side of the flower pot) with soil, this will make a hillside. On the other half put your small stones.
- If you are doing this over the week before Easter, you could always plant some grass seeds in the soil and watch them grow. If you don't have that long, find some moss that is growing on a wall and peel it off to cover the soil area. Add some small flowers to add some colour to your garden.
- With your sticks use them to make three crosses and secure them with bits of string. Stick them into the top of the "hill"; if you have one cross that is bigger than the others, place it in the centre of the three crosses to represent the cross on which Jesus was crucified.
- Finally, with the piece of white cloth, fold it up and put it in the tomb and place the large stone in front of the entrance to the tomb. On Easter Sunday roll the stone away to show that Jesus has risen.



Please do take photos of your finished garden so we can share your creations over the weeks of Easter with others in the churches and in the village. Send them to:

rogergaylor@btinternet.com or martyandruth@googlemail.com