

SUNDAY DEVOTIONS
5 APRIL 2020 – PALM SUNDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God - we come into your presence this day to give you thanks and praise for your steadfast love - that love shown to us through Jesus when he entered into Jerusalem to give his life for us. Help us remember, O God, as we worship you this day why it was that he suffered - and reconcile us to you and to each other as you have reconciled us to yourself by the cross. We ask this grace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

FROM PSALM 118:1, 27-28 AND MATTHEW 21:19

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
God's steadfast love endures forever!
Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest heaven!
The Lord is our God, and has given us light;
Great is our God, and we give thanks to the Lord.
Hosanna to the Son of David!
Hosanna! Save Us, O God. Hosanna! God's steadfast love endures forever.

PRAYER OF ADORATION - *A Litany for Palm Sunday*

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
His steadfast love endures forever!
This is the day that the LORD has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Jesus Christ, you were the stone we rejected,
Yet you have become our Cornerstone,
The one we look to as the best example of God's Love;
The one we exalt above all others.

We are spreading our cloaks out on the path
Laying palm branches at your feet
We offer every good thing we have:
Every talent
Every blessing
Every moment
Every word and thought.
Every thing of value that we claim
We lay at the feet of the King who comes
In humility, in peace, and in Divine Love.

Help us to remain in your steadfast love -
Rooted in gratitude and grounded in your presence;
To stay - no matter what the crowds around us do-
Steeped in compassion and centred in mercy.

Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Saviour God, we confess that we need you because we cannot fulfill your desire for the world alone. We confess that our salvation is caught up in the salvation of others and cannot be personal without it being collective first; for you sent the Only Son for the world, that whoever believes may not die but have eternal life. You sent the Only Son not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through the One. We confess our need of Christ, and we confess our need to serve one another.

Guide us to seek to save the world, not only ourselves, by serving one another and loving our neighbour as ourselves, meeting their needs before our own desires. Hosanna! Save us, O God.

In the name of Christ, the Only Son, the Saviour, we pray. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

The Lord who vindicates you is near.
God has heard your confessions
and you will not be put to shame.
With the Lord God as your help
no one can declare you guilty.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
Be at peace.
Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

BIBLE READINGS

[*Isaiah 50:4-9a*](#)

[*Philippians 2:5-11*](#)

[*Matthew 21:1-11*](#)

SERMON [*The triumphal entry*](#)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH – PALM SUNDAY

In God we trust.
In the One who comes humbly among us,
taking on our humanity and breaking our idols,
in God we trust.
Riding a donkey and weeping over Jerusalem,
receiving shouts of praise from the common people,
gaining the enmity of the proud and the powerful,
in God we trust.
Riding to face a destiny foretold by prophets,
entering the holy city but with nowhere to lay his head,
coming to his own but his own not receiving him,
facing cruel death for the sake of those who love him not,
in God we trust.
This Palm Sunday Man,
this Passion Sunday God,
in God we trust.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Our prophet, priest and king, approach us with your saving grace. Fill us with excitement at your presence that we might offer ourselves to you in all we think and say and do. In gratitude for your abundant love, inspire us to share our gifts with others. (Matt 21:1-11)

Strong and compassionate God, you sustain us with your life-giving word. You waken us to your glories day by day, giving us courage to face the trials and temptations of life in a troublesome world. We pray that your constant presence will inspire us to tell others that YOU are the source of our peace of mind. Make us bold in our proclamation. (Isaiah 50:4-9a)

Steadfast, loving Lord, terrible things are happening in this world you love. Violence, hatred and prejudice surround us on all sides. Around the world, even within our own families, Lord, some days are filled with pain. Let your face shine upon us. Our times are in your hand; deliver us from the hand of our enemies and persecutors. (Psalm 31:9-16)

Glorious God, you gave your Son, Jesus born of Mary, to be our redeemer. He set aside his divinity in order to experience life as one of us. Through his sorrow and joy, pain and happiness, he took our everyday life into your presence. He gave his all for us. Help us to follow his example and to offer ourselves for the well-being of each person you claim as yours, all the people of this world. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Life-giving God, you strengthen those who need to feel your presence in their lives. Be present with these, your children, who need your tender loving care:

This morning we pray especially for...

Through your suffering, dying, and resurrection you brought new life to all the world. Help us, and these we pray for, as we travel through the challenges of life, to find strength, courage and new life in you. (Matt 26:14-27:66)

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BENEDICTION

We go now to follow Christ in obedience -
To have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus;
To keep your ears open to God's teaching;
To be humble, even in the face of hostility
and to not turn back.
Amen.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Lent 6 Year A Palm Sunday

Is. 50:4-9a; Ps. 118:1,-2, 19-29; Phil. 2:5-11; Mt. 21:1-11

05/04/2020

Everyone loves a party, don't they? Who doesn't like a party? Festivals and processions are great ways to bring people together and draw out the spirit of good will. The Olympic Games is a great example, especially the closing ceremony. Everyone cheers as all the athletes parade past with their banners, to the loud music of a band. The greatest accolade is reserved for the medal winners, who are often carried on the shoulders of their team mates as they proudly display their trophies.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the Passover celebrations was an event, somewhat similar to the one I just described. However, instead of being carried on the shoulders of the disciples, Jesus rode along on the back of a young donkey. Instead of loud band music, the people were shouting, "Hosanna". Instead of waving flags, the people were waving palm branches and laying their clothes on the ground in front of Jesus.

If we were to read the following chapters, however, we would find that the accolades that Jesus was receiving on his entry into Jerusalem, were short lived. It didn't take very long for the people, especially the Jewish religious leaders, to turn against him (They probably already had). But this event in the life and ministry of Jesus is of profound importance in our understanding of who Jesus is and how we, as members of the human race, respond to who he is.

What was the message that Jesus was trying to portray as he entered Jerusalem on a young donkey? What were the people, saying about Jesus as they shouted "Hosanna" and laid their clothing on the ground. What is the significance of this event for us today? And what message do we get from the attitude of the crowd who welcomed Jesus as king?

The first, and possibly most important thing to note here, is that this triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, presented him as king. There was no doubt about this in the minds of those who had gathered to cheer him on. This event came at the conclusion of a very successful ministry further north, around the area of Galilee. Much closer to Jerusalem, there was also the raising of Lazarus (which we looked at last week) and the healing of two blind men, who then also followed Jesus.

Jesus had, by this time, made quite a name for himself, among the people of that area, as a great teacher, healer and prophet. Some even recognized him as the long-awaited Messiah who had come to save his people. As Jesus travelled up to Jerusalem, he was also surrounded by others who were coming for the Passover celebrations. As they approached the city gates those around him recalled Psalm 118, which was one of the Songs of Ascent that people would normally be singing, and began to cry out, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The word, “Hosanna”, had by the time of Jesus, become a common term, used in much the same way that we would say, “Hurray”. Originally, however, it had much greater significance. Literally translated it meant, “Save, we pray”. It was a cry of expectation of the coming king.

The term, “Son of David,” was another name used for the Messiah. The Jews believed that the Messiah would come from the line of the great King David and would fulfil God’s promise to David concerning the restoration of the Kingdom. There is no doubt that the crowd saw, however temporarily, Jesus as a Davidic king.

Drawn also from Psalm 118, the term, “The one who comes in the name of the Lord,” also had distinct messianic overtones. Unwittingly the crowd welcomed the true Son of David as King with the Davidic welcome. Without realizing it, they also announced the true nature and mission of Jesus as the Messiah who would save them.

It did not, however, take long for their enthusiasm to wear off, for this was a smack in the face—a real challenge—to the *traditional* Jewish understanding of Messiah.

Isn’t it disappointing when our expectations are not realized? Have you ever woken up on Christmas morning, or perhaps your birthday, expecting a certain present that you’ve been hinting, to everyone, that you wanted, for the last six months, only to find that you didn’t receive it (It’s the story of my childhood). It’s a terrible feeling, isn’t it. Worse still, is finding out that something you had believed in with all your heart, just wasn’t true—like Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. How did you feel, when you finally discovered that Santa Claus and the tooth Fairy were not real? (Sorry if I’ve let the cat out of the bag.) Sometimes we attempt to justify our beliefs beyond all reason.

How fickle we can become when someone contradicts our beliefs—and this is exactly what Jesus did. It didn't take the people long to realize that Jesus was not the Messiah they were looking for (apologies to Star Wars). The Jews were looking for a political Messiah to save them from Roman oppression—not some wimpy dude preaching about love to all.

Instead of entering Jerusalem on a white charger like a conquering king would, Jesus rode on a young donkey in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah. By entering Jerusalem in this way, Jesus redefined the nature of messianic kingship. Rather than a reign characterized by military might, Jesus' reign was to be one grounded in humility and service. Rather than being identified by a throne, Jesus' kingship is marked by a cross. Jesus represented, and still represents, an alternative view of kingship. It's not a political rule, but a rule over the hearts of people.

In this way, the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy is, therefore, fundamental to an understanding of the whole event.

*9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war-horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zech. 9:9-10)*

So, what went wrong? Well, unfortunately, right words without right action leads to rejection.

You have, no doubt, heard the term, "crowd mentality." The crowd, a result of Jesus' Galilean ministry, was becoming more and more enthusiastic as the people approached Jerusalem. They were not from Jerusalem. It is only here, at his arrival, that Jesus is introduced to the people of that city. With all the celebrations, the city was in absolute turmoil. People were in a festive mood, and because of this, it took little to get them going. Even Jerusalem, frozen with religious formalism and being socially undemonstrative was stirred up by the enthusiasm of the crowd that surrounded Jesus.

Ironically enough, it was only after they had travelled some way that someone stopped to ask, "By the way, who is this guy?" The writer of the gospel, however, already knows that the crowd will finally turn against Jesus. Their shouts of "Hosanna" will soon be replaced by shouts of "Crucify him." Their Christology was correct but they didn't transform their words into action.

Because of their shallowness, it didn't take much for the crowds to turn against Jesus. Crowd mentality can also work in the negative. When they realized that Jesus was not the political Messiah that they were expecting, they soon forgot the things he had said and done. Stirred up by infiltrators employed by the religious leaders, they later called for his execution.

When the crowds shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David" and "This is the prophet," they used all the right words, but still missed the point. They had their theology straight but still ended up rejecting Jesus and calling for his death just a few days later. It just goes to show that knowing the truth is not the same as doing the truth. Christianity is not just an academic exercise, it demands a response. What one social psychologist said of university students, is also true of the kingdom: "It is possible to make an A+ in the course on ethics and still flunk life."

Christians do the same thing all the time, without thinking. We come to church on Sunday and say all the right words, pray all the right prayers and sing all the right songs, but during the week we can act as though Sunday never happened. For many, there is a great disparity between our religious practice and the rest of our life. Fortunately for us, Jesus came and died for such people.

As we spend this morning reflecting on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, we need to be mindful of God's precious gift of life to us and our own frailty. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem calls us to remember that he *is* the Messiah, who has come into the world to bring us back into a right relationship with God. However, it also calls us to recognize that we, by our non-action and injustice, constantly reject Christ, in our day-to-day lives. Knowledge of the truth does not make us doers of the truth. Hearers of the Word are not necessarily doers of the Word. Hearing and doing only come by way of faith in Christ and the belief in the validity of his death on the cross for us.

To him be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.