

Readings and reflection for Palm Sunday 5th April 2020

This week's service will include a blessing of a palm cross – if you don't have one to hand you can make one with paper following the instructions here:

<https://mommynippets.com/paper-palm-crosses/>

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 21:1-11

When Jesus and his disciples had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me."³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately."⁴ This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,
⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,
"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"
¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"
¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Reflection by Jan Waterfield

Today is Palm Sunday, a day when we usually gather in church and begin our worship with the blessing of the palm crosses and singing the rousing hymn "All glory, laud and honour". But today is very different. We aren't in church together, we can't re-enact the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem that our Gospel reading records. And we won't share in the very moving Passion narrative spoken by several voices that has become our custom. But we can still enter into Holy Week through prayer and reading.

Holy Week, these last few days before Easter Day, can help each of us to reflect on the question "If I knew this was my last week on earth, how would I spend it?" And by thinking about that, we are helped to enter imaginatively into Jesus' final week before His death, and His resurrection on that first Easter Day. And that time of contemplation can begin today.

The great rescue plan that God put into motion all the way back in Genesis is about to come to a head as Jesus enters the gates of Jerusalem, riding on a donkey with crowds of people laying palm branches and cloaks on His path. Jesus enters the great city to shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" A triumphal entry indeed, but Jesus has gone there to die. In the Gospels we can read for ourselves about Jesus's final path from the gates of Jerusalem all the way to Calvary. Reading those words is deeply moving, because they provoke within us a sense of heaviness as we read of what Jesus did in these few days, and realise that He also knew He would soon make the agonising journey to the cross.

In Holy Week we are confronted with the discomfort of knowing that the crucifixion is drawing nearer each day. So how should we respond to this week? Please don't wait until Good Friday to think about Holy Week, to fully experience the joy of Easter Day we need to start our praying and reading now.

Most of us, if we knew that we would die soon, would want to make sure that those last few days counted. We wouldn't want to waste these precious hours and days doing anything unless it had significant meaning. This week, I encourage you to read through the gospel accounts of Jesus' final earthly days and reflect on each event and teaching and its importance as one of the last things Jesus did or said on His way to the cross. Try to see what Jesus saw and comprehend what He felt. His authority as He preached; His anger as He cleared the temple; His servitude as He washes His disciples feet; His great anxiety as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, and the dread He experienced as He approached His crucifixion.

If we are able to spend some time during the coming week doing this, next Sunday, Easter Day, while not being the great celebration of Jesus' resurrection that we wish we could share together, can be a day when we celebrate in fullness the greatest event the world has ever known: the resurrection of Jesus Christ! That is the truth which means the events of Holy Week are not just confined to the history books; they are alive in our heart forever. Amen.

If you would like to read about the final week of Jesus' life for yourself, you can find the details in each of the gospels at Matthew chapters 21 to 28. Mark 11 to 15. Luke 19 to 23 and John 12 to 19.