

A service for 10th April, 2022 – Palm Sunday (StF)

Lent Prayer

Loving, heavenly Father, it is so easy to abuse our authority over others, to misuse our spiritual gifts and skills and to possess more than we need, rather than helping less fortunate neighbours. Help us to resist temptation to act selfishly and cruelly. Instead, guide us by the perfect example of your dear Son, our Saviour, who gave himself generously as the atonement offering for the sins of the world. Amen.

Call to worship: Psalm 118 verses 22 to 24

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Graham Kendrick in 1986 and it almost echoes the joy of the crowd who welcomed Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It also invites us to let Jesus into our lives. We shall sing hymn number 264, 'Make way, make way, for Christ the King in splendour arrives'.

1. Make way, make way, for Christ the King

In splendour arrives;

Fling wide the gates and welcome him

Into your lives. *Chorus:*

Make way, (make way), make way, (make way),

For the King of kings (for the King of kings):

Make way, (make way), make way, (make way),

And let his kingdom in.

2. He comes the broken hearts to heal,

The prisoners to free;

The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,

The blind shall see. *Chorus:*

3. And those who mourn with heavy hearts,

Who weep and sigh,

With laughter, joy and royal crown

He'll beautify. *Chorus:*

4. We call you now to worship him

As Lord of all,

To have no gods before him,

Their thrones must fall! *Chorus:*

© Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we recall how our Saviour, Jesus, entered Jerusalem to a rapturous welcome, but we remember, too, how, within days, the cries of 'Hosanna' changed to 'Crucify!' Today, on Palm Sunday, we come with awed gratitude that you, who created the universe and all that lives within it, should care for sinful human beings so much that you gave your beloved Son, Jesus, to free us from all our sins by his death on a cross of agony and shame. Grant us new awareness of your redemptive grace as we travel through Holy Week, listening to the story of Christ's suffering and death and then of his

glorious resurrection, next Sunday. May the knowledge of your boundless love inspire our discipleship and may we worship you in spirit, love and truth.

Loving Lord, we thank and praise you for all that you have given us and done for us, for the good things we enjoy, for people who guide, inspire and love us, for the opportunity to worship you freely, but most of all for the willingness of your dear Son, Jesus, to travel resolutely to Jerusalem, knowing that he would face crucifixion to atone for the sins of the world. Thanks to his death and resurrection, the power of both sin and death have been broken and we are free to serve you and our neighbours as a response to your amazing grace. Amazing God, as we think of all that you do for us, may all honour, glory, power and praise be yours for evermore. Amen.

Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.

Hear us, merciful God, as we confess our weakness and failure to live as you want us to. We confess that we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly and we bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We know that, whilst you love us sinners, sin itself angers and grieves you, so we ask you to help us turn away from sin and back to the path we are called to tread. Bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness for the sins we have committed and the good we have failed to do.

Lord, in your mercy..... **Hear our prayer.**

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and, trusting that we have been pardoned, we ask you to strengthen us with the Holy Spirit, so our lives provide evidence of our faith and are a beacon to draw others to know and love Christ Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

We shall say the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

A reflection, based on "One Solitary Life"

You may find some people will challenge our faith by saying that, whilst he was a remarkable man, Jesus was just a human being and nothing more. If they tell you this, consider these facts:

Jesus was born in an unimportant village outside Jerusalem. Jesus was the child of a peasant woman and he grew up in still another village, in part of Judea which was regarded as third-rate by people living in Jerusalem. Jesus worked in a carpenter's shop in that village until he was thirty. He did none of those things one usually links with greatness. He had neither qualifications nor anything to recommend him but himself.

Jesus was only thirty-three when public opinion turned against him. He was betrayed by a friend, turned over to his enemies and condemned without a proper trial. Although he had done nothing wrong, Jesus was tortured and put to death like a common criminal. When he was dead he was laid in a borrowed grave. Three days later, his friends claimed he had been raised from the dead. Other witnesses backed up their claims.

Two thousand years have passed and today he is still the central figure of the human race. Even our calendar recognises him. No ordinary man from peasant stock, who died such a death could have hoped to be remembered so long afterwards.

No one has affected the life of human beings on earth as much as that ONE SINGLE LIFE. Jesus is more than just a human being: he is the Son of God.

Once more, we echo the cries of the crowd on the road to Jerusalem as we sing hymn number 263, 'Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest'.

1. 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!

2. 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 (born 1953)

We come now to our prayers of intercession. We begin with a prayer for Ukraine. Let us pray.

Lord of all nations, you made us, you love us all and understand everything about us. You declared creation 'good', yet we have been poor stewards of the world and our failure to live in peace with our neighbours is heart-breaking. At present our hearts go out to Ukraine and its peoples, as they face attacks by Russia.

In your mercy Lord, be with all Ukrainians: President Zelenskyy and his advisors, the armed forces and militia as they resist Russia's might; civilians, women, children and elderly, who have to shelter from bombardment and who are facing diminishing supplies. Grant them steadfast courage and look on them with compassion. Remember, too, Ukrainian refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. May they be made welcome and receive all the support they need.

We pray that a peace treaty can soon be negotiated to end the conflict, that the Kremlin's plans are frustrated and that Ukraine will remain a free, democracy after hostilities have ceased. May other nations continue to provide practical support and hospitality not only during the conflict, but as long as help is needed.

Above all, Lord, restore peace to Ukraine and help it rebuild what war has destroyed. We offer our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

We continue with prayers about our concerns for the world.

God of creation, although we have been blessed with this achingly beautiful planet, we grieve and lament about the brokenness we see here and abroad. We want to play what part we can in making the world a better place, but we recognize that our own powers are limited and confess that, at times, many complex situations threaten to overwhelm us. However, we are not afraid to ask you to reach out to inspire people with greater ability, power and influence than we possess; people who can heal the suffering around us, for we know that to you all things are possible. Nevertheless, Lord, give us the courage to play what part we can by campaigning against both prejudice and injustice, by doing all we can to relieve poverty, by learning to use the earth's resources more carefully and by encouraging others to do so, too.

Lord of all nations, besides praying for an end to the conflict in Ukraine, we pray for peace across the world. Guide national leaders to resolve disputes with neighbours by negotiation rather than resorting to military action. Instead, may they learn to rule with justice and mercy, for only then can true peace be established and prevail. In your mercy, hear our prayer for all victims of warfare, terrorism and persecution. Grant them the resources and encouragement they need to rebuild their lives and to be healed in body, mind and spirit.

We pray for the people of Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan where serious famines may lead to catastrophic loss of life. May the situation in Ukraine not divert the attention of governments and relief agencies from providing much-needed aid.

Gracious Lord of well-being, look with compassion on people around us who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. May they receive the professional care and support they need to be restored to health and may they experience your loving presence during their time of need.

We remember people who have lost loved-ones during the past two years, both because of COVID19 and for other reasons, but who have been unable either to mark their passing or to mourn because of restrictions at funerals. We pray for neighbours who are suffering from the physical, mental, social and economic effects of the pandemic and, not least of all, for children whose education and general wellbeing have been seriously harmed during the pandemic. Grant them the support, comfort and courage to recover.

In a time of silence, we bring to mind people around us who are in special need of your care and, as we name them before you, we are confident you will know their needs and will reach out to them in loving-kindness: Lord, wherever possible, help us to offer them practical support and friendship and we ask you to embrace everybody for whom we pray with the warmth of your love, offering them healing, courage, comfort and lasting peace.

Holy God, we pray not only for churches in our district, but the World Church as we emerge from the dark shadow of coronavirus. Help us learn new, effective ways of meeting the needs of our communities and to reflect the goodness and grace of Jesus by serving him with united, faithful hearts.

Abba, Father God, bless us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to shine the light of your love in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

Our First reading is Luke chapter 19 verses 28 to 40

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them,

“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them,

“Why are you untying the colt?”

They replied,

“The Lord needs it.”

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus,

“Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” Amen.

The second reading is Luke chapter 23 verses 32 to 47

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said,

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said,

"He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One."

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said,

"If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him:

"Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him.

"Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered him,

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice,

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said,

"Surely this was a righteous man." Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Revd. Fred Pratt Green, a Methodist minister and prolific hymn-writer who was born in 1903 and died in 2000. The Editors of “Singing the Faith” directs us to move from one verse into the next without a break. Hymn number 267, ‘Jesus in the olive grove’.

**1. Jesus in the olive grove
Waiting for a traitor’s kiss,
Rises free from bitterness.**

**2. As he wakes his comrades up,
Torches flicker in the glen;
Shadows turn to marching men.**

**3. In that dawn of blows and lies
Church and State conspire to kill,
Hang three rebels on a hill.**

**4. Innocent and guilty drown
In a flood of blood and sweat.
How much darker can it get?**

**5. How much darker must it be
For a God to see and care
That we perish in despair?**

**6. It is God himself who dies!
God in man shall set us free:
God as Man – and only he.**

**7. Let him claim us as his own;
We will serve as best we can
Such a God and such a Man!**

© Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)

Address: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Luke 19:38

Some commentators say a week is a long time in politics and certainly some politicians have fallen from grace very quickly, but few people have experienced as dramatic a reversal as Jesus. Let me try to explain how his triumphal entry into Jerusalem seemed to have ended in total disaster within a week.

Jesus and his disciples were travelling from Jericho to Jerusalem to celebrate Pessach, the festival we call Passover. Faithful Jews were expected to worship at the temple at major festivals, but Passover was the most important of all, for it reminds Jews of the Lord’s saving grace when he not only freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt but guided them to the Promised Land. At Passover, Jews find comfort and strength, for they know that the Lord did not just create the world and then abandon it, but actively seeks our wellbeing. Peter had already declared Jesus to be the Christ, because three years’ discipleship had taught me that Jesus’ wisdom and power over nature and death were far beyond mortal gifts. Indeed, he had raised Lazarus four days after he had been placed in his tomb, by which time his body would have begun decomposing. As a result, the disciples were almost beside ourselves with excitement as they began from the house at Bethany where Lazarus, Martha and Mary had been their hosts.

Imagine how perplexed they must have been when Jesus chose to enter Zion riding on a young donkey. They still thought he was going to drive out the Roman occupiers, so

surely he should have ridden into the city on a fine warhorse as befits a great king. However, they knew the Roman garrison was always on high alert against rebellions during Passover, so they may have reasoned that it may have been a clever ploy to present himself as Zechariah's Messiah – **'See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'** After all, he could start an uprising more easily if the authorities weren't watching his every move.

The disciples walked by his side with other followers as they descended the hill by the Mount of Olives towards the entrance of the Holy City. They were shouting, **"Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"** and others along the road – especially Galileans who'd seen some of Jesus' miracles – joined in and cast their coats and palm branches in front of the donkey as a sign of reverence for the Messiah. Inevitably, some Pharisees approached and demanded that Jesus should tell us to be quiet, but he was not having any more of their nonsense. He wanted everyone to know he is the Messiah and declared that if we were silent, then the very stones would testify to him.

So Jesus rode into Jerusalem in triumph and the followers thought a revolution was imminent. The twelve believed he would reveal his power and glory, which they, of course, would share, but they could not have been further from the truth. Although Jesus outwitted the loaded questions of Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in the temple, he made no attempt to raise a rebellion there which may have disillusioned many fellow Jews. Then at the supper we shared the following Wednesday, he washed the disciples' feet like a low servant and when Peter protested, he told him that if he didn't allow him to wash his feet, he could have no part in his kingdom. The disciples were confused, so Jesus told them they'd understand later. Later in the meal, the Master declared he would be betrayed and put to death, but would rise on the third day. Peter retorted that he'd die with him, but he said Peter would deny even knowing him three times on the night of his arrest. Even then, Judas Iscariot had left the supper to betray our Lord.

That very night Jesus was betrayed; the other disciples fled and went into hiding, whilst Peter went to the Chief Priest Caiaphas' palace to see what was happening to Jesus and, yes, he was so afraid and confused by his master's lack of resistance that three times he denied even knowing him, so he joined the others and only learned of Jesus' crucifixion from the womenfolk and John, because no one else was willing to risk going to Calvary.

They were told the heart-breaking story of how Jesus' back had been torn by the savage scourging, how he had nailed to the cross to die like a cursed criminal, mocked by Pharisees, priests and Roman soldiers, yet the women declared that he prayed that his killers would be forgiven. He even assured one of the criminals who hung by his side that he would meet him in paradise. Amidst the world's hatred and his intense agony, Jesus still offered love and hope. What amazing grace!

The people in that locked room thought the great adventure was over: their Master crucified; the Good News postponed indefinitely. They cowered behind the closed doors of that house, terrified they'd share Jesus' fate. All seemed lost; everything turned to dust and ashes. But it wasn't the end of the story, for next week we shall celebrate the turning point in human history when the darkness of crucifixion was dispelled – swept aside – by the light of Christ's resurrection. Alleluia! Praise the Lord! Amen.

“See from his head, his hands, his feet, / Sorrow and love flow mingled down; / Did e’er such love and sorrow meet, / Or thorns compose so rich a crown?” The father of English hymnody, Isaac Watts, gave us what is probably the finest of all hymns – number 287, ‘When I survey the wondrous cross’.

**1. When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.**

**2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.**

**3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?**

**4. His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o’er his body on the tree;
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.**

**5. Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.**

© *Isaac Watts {1674 – 1748}*

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.