

**A service for Lent 6 – 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2021 (StF) Palm Sunday**

**Call to worship: Zechariah chapter 9 verse 9**

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Amen.

*Our first hymn, both words and melody, was written by American singer/songwriter Carl Tuttle in 1965. We shall sing the hymn twice. 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)

***Let us pray.***

God our Saviour, Creator of the universe and Giver of life, we come to worship you in awe and adoration, for you have blessed us with your love, despite our sinfulness. Instead of abandoning us as we deserve, you took our mortal form as Jesus Christ. You showed us in words and deeds how you want us to live and have redeemed us from the power of sin and death through the blood of Christ at Calvary. Through faith in him, we have the gift of eternal life and death no longer has the final word. Amazing God, bless and accept the best we can offer you in our worship, for you alone are worthy of all honour, glory and praise. Amen.

Merciful Lord, we humbly acknowledge that we are sometimes half-hearted in our response to follow and serve you, that we are quick to judge others and to take offence, besides being loth to forgive our neighbours. We know that we are not in a good position to expect you to forgive us for the sins we have committed and the good we've neglected to do. Today we remember that your dear Son died on a cross of agony and shame to wash away our sins with his precious blood and he even forgave those who killed him. Therefore, heavenly Father, soften our hearts, so we may first forgive people who have wronged us and rectify our own wrongdoing, before we seek your pardon, so we may be reconciled to our neighbours and to you.

Amazing God, you hear and answer our prayer, offering not only your pardon, but inviting us to follow you once more. Let us do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, so by serving our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, we may glorify you in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

***We shall say the prayer our Lord taught his disciples:***

**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.**

*Our next hymn was printed in Bishop Heber's, "Hymns written and adapted to the weekly church service of the year" of 1827 and was described in Julian's "Dictionary of Hymnology" as 'the most popular hymn for Palm Sunday in the English language'. To be fair the "Dictionary of Hymnology" was printed in 1892, so whilst it is still popular, there are a number of more recent hymns that are as favoured. Nevertheless, it is an exceptionally good hymn. Number 265 in "Singing the Faith", 'Ride on, ride on, in majesty'.*

**1. Ride on, ride on in majesty!**

**Hark! all the tribes 'Hosanna!' cry;  
Your humble beast pursues its road  
With palms and scattered garments strowed.**

**2. 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.**

**3. Ride on, ride on in majesty!**

**The winged squadrons of the sky  
Look down with sad and wondering eyes  
To see the approaching sacrifice.**

**4. Ride on, ride on in majesty!**

**Your last and fiercest strife is nigh;  
The Father on his sapphire throne  
Expects his own anointed Son.**

**5. 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.**

© Henry Hart Milman (1791 –1868)

***We come now to our prayers of intercession. Let us pray.***

Sovereign God, you are our strength and refuge in times of trouble. You have blessed us with your love and we offer praise and thanksgiving for all you have given us, done for us and accomplished in us, but most of all for the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, our Redeemer and friend. In response to your grace, we turn to you, seeking to act as your earthly hands by helping neighbours who are in need or any kind of trouble. Although we know our own powers are limited and, at times the brokenness of our world threatens to overwhelm us, we are not afraid to ask you to reach out to inspire people with power and influence, who can heal the suffering we see around us, for we know that to you all things are possible.

Lord of the outsider and marginalised, hear our prayer for people who are facing furlough, unemployment, depression, debt, homelessness, addiction or broken relationships. May they receive practical support but also open their hearts and minds, so that they have the good judgement and courage to accept such help that is offered them to overcome their problems.

Lord of the poor, vulnerable and overlooked, we bring our concern for people who lack resources, for whom life is a struggle to survive. Enable us to fulfil our mission to help them through the ministries of our churches and organisations who serve the poor, here and abroad. Guide your Church throughout this pandemic, so we may reveal the light of your love to people for whom life is overshadowed by want and despair.

Lord of the world, guide and inspire the leaders of the nations to seek justice and to deal mercifully with their peoples, for only when justice and mercy prevail will lasting peace be forged. We pray for real peace, for an end to conflicts, persecution and terrorism that cause not only injury, death and destruction, but swell the number of refugees who seek to escape from terror and suffering. Lord, help the many victims of warfare, persecution and terrorism not only to rebuild their broken lives, but to receive and enjoy the support of their host communities.

Lord of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, look with compassion on people we know who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. May they find healing, renewed strength and hope, not only by receiving good care and support, but by experiencing your holy presence in their time of need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia, their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them. Reassure them in their confusion, comfort them in their distress and uphold them through the uncharted waters of dementia. Above all else, let all of them feel loved and valued even in the midst of the difficulties caused by COVID19.

Remember, too, our neighbours who are lonely, overworked, unloved or undervalued and everyone who has lost loved ones, especially people whose lives have been taken by this wretched virus. In a time of silence, we bring to you the names of people for whom we are particularly concerned.

.....  
Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but enfold everybody for whom we pray in the warmth of your love, from which comes healing, courage, comfort and peace.

Sovereign Lord, encourage the Government and their advisors to adopt policies that will bring us safely through this pandemic whether or not they are popular or politically expedient. We ask a special blessing upon the NHS, scientists and all keyworkers, as they endeavour to heal us and keep us safe throughout this crisis. May all they are doing not be undermined by foolish or selfish behaviour, especially at a time when there is hope of bringing COVID19 under control.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our friends and our families. May your Holy Spirit unite us in love and mission, so that through our words and actions everybody may come to believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world. Amen.

*We continue our worship with a superb hymn by Graham Kendrick, but one that embarrasses me whenever I see it. Several years ago, I opened worship with this hymn at Gig Mill when I was wearing a lapel microphone and was not muted. Although the organist played the melody beautifully, I completely lost the tune and sang the chorus absolutely flat. Sadly, the congregation followed me, not the organist, whose look of despair made me stop immediately, apologize and begin again. I think he learned to mute me thereafter! Hymn number 264, 'Make way, make way, for Christ the King'.*

**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)*

**The Gospel reading is Luke chapter 19 verses 28 to 39**

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!" Amen.

*Graham Kendrick wrote our next hymn for the Spring Harvest of 1984 after much research into the concept of the God, who created and loves everything, taking human form, becoming the Suffering Servant. Surely, few descriptions of the passion have been written with greater poignancy than the verse,*

*'Come see His hands and His feet,  
The scars that speak of sacrifice,  
Hands that flung stars into space  
To cruel nails surrendered.*

*We shall sing hymn number 272, 'The Servant King'.*

**1. From heaven You came,  
Helpless babe, entered our world,  
Your glory veiled; not to be served  
But to serve and give Your life  
That we might live. *Chorus:***

*This is our God, the Servant King,  
He calls us now to follow Him,  
To bring our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship to the Servant King.*

**2. There in the garden of tears,  
My heavy load he chose to bear;  
His heart with sorrow was torn,  
'Yet not My will but Yours,' He said. *Chorus:***

**3. Come see His hands and His feet,  
The scars that speak of sacrifice;  
Hands that flung stars into space  
To cruel nails surrendered. *Chorus:***

**4. So let us learn how to serve,  
And in our lives enthrone Him;  
Each other's needs to prefer,  
For it is Christ we're serving. *Chorus:*** © *Graham Kendrick (born 1950)*

**Sermon: Grace under pressure – Luke 19:28 – 39**

It is said that a week is a long time in politics and the fortunes of many governments have turned very quickly: one day riding high; the next brought low. It is certainly true of Holy Week, that amazing Pessach, or Passover Festival when Jesus changed from one hailed as the Messiah by the crowd to the one for whose death they demanded.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus and his followers had set out from Jericho, shortly after his encounter with the chief tax-collector, Zacchaeus. His followers were euphoric as they walked towards Jerusalem, some seventeen miles from Jericho, for they believed that Christ's arrival at the Holy City would result in the immediate appearance of the kingdom of God. Therefore, Jesus told them a parable of a master who gave his servants ten minas, (sometimes translated as pounds), while he went to another country to be crowned. Whilst the parable is similar to the one about the talents, it was a warning that the fulfilment of God's kingdom would take a long time.

Jesus was already aware that the authorities in Jerusalem had determined to find and arrest Jesus, which make his triumphal entry into the city a most audacious act, for instead of hiding in fear, he made a most public of entrances. The real issue Jesus faced was the different ideas held by the people about the nature of the Messiah. Most Jews expected the one anointed by God to be the figure from Isaiah 63 whose clothes were stained with the blood of Judea's enemies. They thought he would end the Roman occupation, restore Judah to the state that it had enjoyed during King David's lifetime, before the Messiah compelled God's people to honour their covenant with God. Such an expectation was natural enough, considering that Judea had been occupied for over three and a half centuries by this time, first by the Seleucid Greeks, and then by the Roman Empire.

However, Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem on a young donkey, like the humble king from Zechariah, a prince of peace, not a warrior king. He sent two disciples to collect a donkey colt from a village near to Bethany and this had clearly been pre-arranged, for when the disciples told the donkey's owners, 'The Lord needs it', they were allowed to take it. Notice how, when the donkey was taken to Jesus, it was the disciples who put their cloaks on the donkey's back, in lieu of a saddle and it was they who put Jesus on it. Despite riding through the city gates on a donkey, the huge crowd

greeted him with enthusiastic messianic greetings of, "**Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!**" "**Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!**" Luke ignored details in other gospels of the people in the huge crowd casting palm leaves beneath the donkey's feet, as a sign of respect, but recorded that they cast their outer garments onto the road, which is more significant than palm leaves, as their clothing was their most expensive possession. The enthusiasm of the huge crowd was contagious and Jesus did nothing to dampen their spirits, though he knew the story would end at Golgotha. With remarkable love for the people, Jesus set aside his inner-turmoil and grief to allow the people – his people and his disciples – to rejoice. In fact, had Jesus led a rebellion on the day that he entered Jerusalem, the people would have followed him and he might have succeeded in driving the Romans from the city. However, that was not God's plan, for God wins his people by boundless, patient love, not by force.

Even as he entered the city, Jesus was not deceived into thinking there could be another outcome to dying on a cross, for Pharisees in the crowd demanded that he should silence the crowd's celebrations, but Jesus retorted that, "**if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out**", a reference to Habakkuk chapter 2, '**You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it**'. In other words, so joyful was their celebration of the coming of the Messiah that it was not fit that he should attempt to impose silence on them. Remember that, all this time Jesus' heart was breaking at the prospect of crucifixion in only a few days time, yet his grace was so great that he would not let his own fears and concerns mar their joy.

Christ knew the celebrations would end far too soon, especially after he drove the traders from the temple. Every time he taught, Pharisees and Scribes asked questions to try to trip him up, but the Lord was too clever for them. Nevertheless, it was clear that the establishment was trying everything in its power to destroy him, because he did not fit their image of what the Christ should be. They envisaged the Messiah as that warrior king; instead they found a peace-loving Galilean carpenter; they expected a Messiah who would be materially rich and nobly-born, but they were faced by a man with few possessions, yet rich in chesed, loving-kindness, a master who, later that week, washed his followers' feet; they thought the Messiah would praise their religious traditions and exclusivity, instead of which they were faced by radical new ideas from a Messiah who sought out the lost, sinful, despised and marginalized and whose call was for us to love God and our neighbours.

Although the Son of God lived amongst a people who had been looking for the Messiah for hundreds of years, most of them failed to recognize him because they were blinded by their own prejudices. Even one of the twelve, the zealot, Judas Iscariot, tried to force his hand, betraying him in hope that, in resisting arrest, Jesus would begin a revolution that would end Roman occupation. By not resisting, our Lord began another revolution which broke the iron grip of sin and death over mankind.

And so, we move towards the Last Supper, the spiritual agony in Gethsemane, the betrayal by a friend, desertion by his other friends, a show trial, condemnation, brutal abuse and a hideous death under a Deuteronomic curse. However, if the story had ended there, Jesus would have swiftly been forgotten as a good but deluded man. Instead, he was raised from the tomb and forged a new covenant that offers hope to all-comers. When Jesus cried, "**It is finished!**" on the cross, you might have thought it was a cry of defeat, but the Greek word '**tetelestai**' means more than that. It was used

at the bottom of bills to show that the debt had been paid. In other words, he declared that his death had paid the price of our freedom from enslavement to sin.

Our reading challenges us to serve and love others joyfully, even when life is hard and our hearts are breaking: to put the needs of others before our own. The past year of COVID19 has burdened us all with loss, grief, a sense of helplessness and even hopelessness. It would be so easy to throw up our hands in despair and ignore Christ's call to reveal good news to our neighbours in distress, first by tendering practical help and support, then by revealing why we are doing it. The challenge is not an easy one, but we see brokenness all around us and we are the hands and feet of One whose own hands and feet were nailed to the cross to redeem us. May God grant us grace to answer our call joyfully, using all our talents, gifts and graces to reflect the love of Jesus upon a world darkened by this pandemic. 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?’ We close our worship with a hymn by the father of English hymnody, Isaac Watts, which I rate as the finest of 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.**