

A service for Palm Sunday: 29th March, 2026 (StF)

May God bless Abie Dutton for planning the hymns and first half of today's service as she goes 'on note' as a local preacher. The long introductions to the hymns are my work, however.

Call to Worship: Psalm 118 verses 25 to 27

O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written in 821 A.D. by Bishop Theodulph of Orleans when he was a prisoner in Angers Monastery, accused of conspiring against King Louis the Pious. It remains popular because it catches the mood of the crowd on the first Palm Sunday, as they cried 'Hosanna!' to Jesus when he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Hymn number 262, 'All glory, laud and honour'.

1. All Glory, laud, and honour

To thee, Redeemer, King!

To whom the lips of children

Made sweet hosannas ring.

Thou art the King of Israel,

Thou David's royal Son,

Who in the Lord's name comest,

The King and Blessed One.

2. The company of angels

Are praising thee on high;

And mortal men, and all things

Created, make reply.

The people of the Hebrews

With palms before thee went:

Our praise and prayer and anthems

Before thee we present.

3. To thee before thy passion

They sang their hymns of praise:

To thee, now high-exalted,

Our melody we raise.

Thou didst accept their praises;

Accept the prayers we bring,

Who in all good delightest,

Thou good and gracious King.

4. All Glory, laud, and honour

To thee, Redeemer, King!

To whom the lips of children

Made sweet hosannas ring!

© Theodulph of Orleans (d. 821) Tr. John Mason Neale (1818 – 1866)

The first gospel reading is Matthew chapter 21 verses 7 to 11 (NIV)

They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked,

"Who is this?" The crowds answered,

"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." Amen.

Short address 1: The triumphal entry – Matthew 21: 7 -11

I am not sure about you, but I think it would be incredible to be a witness to that story. To hear it all, to see the crowd and to feel the power that crowd had, enough to stir the entire city. But when we really think about it, for Jesus this wasn't unique. He was used to the crowds shouting for help; they followed him everywhere. Think about the feeding of the 5000. He's used to the crowds. So what is so special here? Well the timing for certain, but also how they approach Jesus here is unique. They don't just witness Jesus – they publicly declare him as Messiah!

Let's start at the beginning: it's Passover time so every Jew is travelling to Jerusalem to celebrate Jewish liberation from slavery in Egypt. These people who are travelling are expecting a Messiah and they probably know their scripture quite well. They've heard the prophetic messages of the Old Testament. Then as they are on their pilgrimage, they see a man who they've either seen doing miraculous things, heard speaking of things above our earthly knowledge or they've heard the gossip about him. And not only do they see him, but they see him riding a donkey – more than that, they see him fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy. Now he probably isn't the only person not walking but with all the rumours and the fact that this crowd are desperate for a Messiah to save them from Roman oppression it probably was not difficult for them to decide this was their King.

Who knows how it started, but we end up with a crowd with hope and excitement. They are so hopeful that they replicate the crowd in 2 Kings 9:13 when Jehu was declared King: the people laid their cloaks before him. In their actions they are calling Jesus their King. Then to really demonstrate that this is their King, they shout out "Hosanna to the Son of David", making it explicit that they believe this is their Davidic king who will save them from oppression.

The Jewish population had been waiting for so long for a Messiah. Their expectation was so high that now, in this moment of hope, they shout out their praise, they make noise, they partake in acts of respect by waving palm branches, they share their praise with one another and they stir the city. This crowd wanted saving desperately, but their first thought was to praise. They celebrated him instead of immediately placing their demands for salvation on him. Now, as a side note, the crowd doesn't understand everything about Jesus yet and their expectations are not perfect but in this moment they still boldly declare him. This crowd managed to stir an entire city. They evangelised to the whole of Jerusalem. They told everyone within ear-shot that they believed in Jesus Christ. This crowd risked their reputation, their safety, even their lives to declare Jesus as King. And yet today, many of us struggle to even mention him in conversation. We share the good news with other believers but rarely with our neighbours, colleagues, or friends.

This crowd risked it all to shout praise to Jesus. What do we risk to praise Jesus? Who do we tell about our King, our Saviour? Maybe we should be more like the crowd. Maybe we should share what we know more. Imagine how incredible it would be if we could stir a city? But let's start smaller, because small actions add up. How amazing would it be if we stirred the heart of one person? Maybe this passion week, that is our challenge, to stir hearts, to share the good news of Jesus going to Jerusalem with

others. Jesus not only walked this path for the Jews then but for us now as well. Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna in the highest heaven. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Henry Milman and published in Bishop Heber's, "Hymns written and adapted to the weekly church service of the year" of 1827. It 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 there are a number of more recent hymns that are as favoured. Nevertheless, it is fine hymn for Palm Sunday. Number 265, '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)

Our opening prayer is responsive, using those beautiful words of praise from our reading. When I say "Hosanna to the Son of David", please respond, "Hosanna in the highest heaven"?

Hosanna to the Son of David. **Hosanna in the highest heaven**
God of all, this passion week we focus our thoughts on Jesus Christ our Saviour and our King.

Hosanna to the Son of David. **Hosanna in the highest heaven**
We adore you Christ our King:
You who came not in power but humility;
You who came and ate with the poor and the outcast;
You who came to bring salvation.

Hosanna to the Son of David. **Hosanna in the highest heaven**
Lord, we confess that sometimes we are quick to shout our praise, but slow to pick up our cross and follow you.
We confess that sometimes we get caught up in the celebrations and fail to see the bigger picture.

We confess that sometimes we, too, come with heavy expectation and fail to put our trust in you.

Hosanna to the Son of David. **Hosanna in the highest heaven**

Lord, we thank you for your mercy:

For not running from Jerusalem and what awaited you there;

For not turning your back on all people when they turned their backs on you;

For walking the road to Golgotha for us;

For bearing the weight of our sin for us.

Hosanna to the Son of David. **Hosanna in the highest heaven**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Glory be yours now and forever. **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.

The second gospel reading is Matthew chapter 27 verses 15 to 26 (MSG)

It was an old custom during the Feast for the governor to pardon a single prisoner named by the crowd. At the time, they had the infamous Jesus Barabbas in prison. With the crowd before him, Pilate said,

"Which prisoner do you want me to pardon: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus the so-called Christ?" He knew it was through sheer spite that they had turned Jesus over to him.

While court was still in session, Pilate's wife sent him a message: "Don't get mixed up in judging this noble man. I've just been through a long and troubled night because of a dream about him."

Meanwhile, the high priests and religious leaders had talked the crowd into asking for the pardon of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. The governor asked,

"Which of the two do you want me to pardon?" They said,

"Barabbas!"

"Then what do I do with Jesus, the so-called Christ?" They all shouted,

"Nail him to a cross!" He objected,

"But for what crime?" But they yelled all the louder,

"Nail him to a cross!"

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere and that a riot was imminent, he took a basin of water and washed his hands in full sight of the crowd, saying,

"I'm washing my hands of responsibility for this man's death. From now on, it's in your hands. You're judge and jury." The crowd answered,

"We'll take the blame, we and our children after us." Then he pardoned Barabbas. But he had Jesus whipped, and then handed over for crucifixion. Amen.

Graham Kendrick will probably be called the Charles Wesley of the Twentieth Century, not only because of the number of hymns and worship songs he has produced, but by his theological grasp and poetic ability. He was a son of a Baptist pastor and has spent his life promoting Good News. We continue our worship as we sing hymn number 270, 'Come and see, come and see,'

1. Come and see, come and see,
Come and see the King of love;
See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears.
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer
As he lifts the cruel cross;
Lone and friendless now, he climbs towards the hill. *Chorus:*
We worship at your feet,
Where wrath and mercy meet,
And a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream.
For us he was made sin –
Oh, help me take it in.
Deep wounds of love cry out, 'Father, forgive.'
I worship, I worship
The Lamb who was slain.

2. Come and weep, come and mourn
For your sin that pierced him there;
So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail.
All our pride, all our greed,
All our fallenness and shame;
And the Lord has laid the punishment on him. *Chorus:*

3. Man of heaven, born to earth
To restore us to your heaven.
Here we bow in awe beneath your searching eyes.
From your tears comes our joy,
From your death our life shall spring;
By your resurrection power we shall rise. *Chorus:* © Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

Short address 2: But they yelled all the louder, "Nail him to a cross!" Matthew 27:23

Shabbat shalom chaverim. Let me introduce myself. I am Shimone bar Jonas, called Cephas by my Master, or Peter, a fisherman and follower of Jesus the Christ. I want to explain what happened in the week that followed our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. You have a saying 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. Certainly, Holy Week marks that amazing Pessach Festival, or Passover when the Lord changed from one adored by the people to the one whose death they demanded. To put it simply, in the eyes of Judeans he was the wrong kind of Messiah!

We had set out from Bethany after Lazarus, had been raised from the dead, four days after he had been buried, making many witnesses – mostly from Galilee Province believe he was the Messiah, God's anointed. The problem was many fellow Jews expected the Messiah to be the warrior from **Isaiah 63** whose clothes were stained with the blood of Judea's enemies. They thought he would destroy the Roman occupiers, restore Judah to the state that had been enjoyed during King David's lifetime, before he compelled God's people to honour their covenant with God. Yet my Master entered the Holy City on a young donkey, like the humble king from Zechariah, a prince of peace, not a warrior king. Despite this, a huge crowd greeted him with shouts of, '**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**' I believe had Jesus led a rebellion on the day that he entered Jerusalem, the people would have followed him and

he might have succeeded. However, that was not the Lord's plan, for God wins his people by boundless, patient love, not by force.

Although the Lord had 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. The hierarchy in the Sanhedrin saw Jesus as no more than an agitator from the province of Galilee which was notorious for false Messiahs who had led uprisings against the occupying Romans, often resulting in severe reprisals and blood-letting among ordinary Jews. They could not see his Godhood through his deeds and teaching, because he did not congratulate them for their observance of the Rules of Righteousness, but pointed out that their customs were actually leading them away from God the Father. Even one of us, 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. However, by not resisting, our Lord began a revolution that broke the iron grip of sin and death over mankind.

And so, we move towards the Last Supper, when he washed our feet like a slave, his spiritual torment in Gethsemane, his betrayal by Judas, our desertion in his hour of need, my shameful denial at Caiaphas' palace, despite my boast that I would die with him. It was only after a breakfast with the risen Master that I was able to forgive myself, even though he'd long since pardoned my failure. Inevitably there was a show trial, his condemnation, brutal abuse and hideous death. However, if the story had ended there, Jesus the Christ would have swiftly been forgotten as a good but deluded man. Instead of that, he was raised from the tomb, but if you want to hear about the resurrection, you will need to come here next Sunday!

You ought to know that when Jesus cried, **"It is finished!"** on the cross, it was not a cry of defeat, because 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 announced that his death had paid the price of our freedom from enslavement to Satan. Our reading challenges us to face up to prejudice in all its subtle forms, to open our inner eye and see others as the Lord sees them, not as society does. How can we respond to that wonderful love which took Jesus to his death at Calvary? We can respond by joyfully using all our talents, gifts and graces to reflect the love of Jesus upon a world darkened by selfishness and unbelief. Shabbat shalom! Amen.

It is fair to say that Samuel Crossman lived in turbulent times: in his lifetime the English Civil War and the Restoration happened; King Charles I was beheaded, "The Book of Common Prayer" was outlawed and the celebration of Christmas was forbidden. He became a vicar at Little Henny in Essex, but he was appointed King's Chaplain, became Prebendary or Dean of Bristol Cathedral, where in 1664 he wrote a pamphlet of nine poems, one of which was "My song is love unknown".

When Revd. Crossman wrote these verses, hymns were not sung in churches, metrical Psalms being the order of the day, so it might well have lain in obscurity, except for the remarkable John Ireland. He wrote his melody, "Love Unknown", in 1919 for "The Public School Hymn Book" at the suggestion of his friend, Geoffrey Shaw: It is claimed that it took him only a quarter of an hour to write down the music on a scrap of paper – even faster than John Hughes when he wrote 'Calon Lan' in an afternoon. We shall sing hymn number 277 'My song is love unknown,'

**1. My song is love unknown,
My Saviour's love for me,**

Love to the loveless shown,
That they might lovely be.
O who am I.

That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh and die?

2. He came from his blest throne,
Salvation to bestow;
But men made strange and none
The longed-for Christ would know.
But O my Friend,
My Friend indeed,
Who at my need
His life did spend.

3. Sometimes they strew his way,
And his sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King.
Then 'Crucify!'
Is all their breath,
And for his death
They thirst and cry.

4. Why, what hath my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
He gave the blind their sight.
Sweet injuries!
Yet they at these
Themselves displease
And 'gainst him rise.

5. They rise and needs will have
My dear Lord made away:
A murderer they save,
The Prince of Life they slay;
Yet cheerful he
To suffering goes,
That he his foes
From thence might free.

6. In life no house, no home,
My Lord on earth might have;
In death, no friendly tomb
But what a stranger gave.
What may I say?
Heaven was his home;
But mine the tomb
Wherein he lay.

7. Here might I stay and sing,

**No story so divine:
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like thine!
This is my Friend,
In whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend.**

© Samuel Crossman {1624 – 1684}

In our prayers of intercession, we pray for people nearby or far away.

Oh heavenly Father, as we recall how your dear Son was broken and crucified to offer healing to the world, it is heart-breaking to see the brokenness of this wonderful planet, caused mainly through our failure to live as you want us to. Lord, help us to serve you in Jesus' holy name, but we know that our power is finite, whereas yours it unlimited. Therefore, we pray that you will influence people with greater power and influence to do what we cannot do. Nevertheless, we bring you our concerns in Jesus' precious name.

Lord, there are so many conflicts in the world, the consequences of which are far-reaching and not only for the warring parties. Jesus rode into Jerusalem as Prince of Peace, so in his name we ask that the leaders of those nations learn to negotiate a just ending of those wars. We pray for the victims of warfare, persecution, prejudice and discrimination, asking that you will ease their suffering and help them rebuild what conflict has destroyed, so they may live in peace and security.

We remember people in our community who are needy or troubled: the sick, lonely, anxious and burdened. Those burdened by unemployment, addiction, broken relationships and bereavement: people who are at the end of their tether. In a time of silence, we offer you names of people for whom we are particularly concerned. Wherever possible enable us to offer them practical support, but embrace them with the healing of your love, so they may experience the real peace that only you can give.

Lord, hear our prayer for the Church, here and throughout the world. Give us the faith we need to stand firm when we are challenged or threatened. Keep us steadfast and loving in good times and bad. Keep us as loving in the face of opposition, as was our Saviour, so we may be bearers of good news, God's love for all-comers.

Abba, heavenly Father, may you blessing rest upon us, our families and friends. Help us to overcome the trials of life, keep us safe, but most of all, help us to share the abundance of your love with everyone we meet, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by John Bell and the late Graham Maule of the Iona Community. Most of their hymns have been set to Scots ballads, but in this case it is an Irish melody, 'Wild mountain thyme'. We shall sing hymn number 324, 'In a byre near Bethlehem'.

**1. In a byre near Bethlehem,
Passed by many a wandering stranger
The most precious Word of Life
Was heard gurgling in a manger,
For the good of us all. *Chorus:*
*And he's here when we call him,
Bringing health, love and laughter,
To life now and ever after,
For the good of us all.***

2. By the Galilean Lake

Where the people flocked for teaching,
The most precious Word of Life
Fed their mouths as well as preaching,
For the good of us all. *Chorus:*

3. Quiet was Gethsemane,
Camouflaging priest and soldier;
The most precious Word of Life
Took the world's weight on his shoulder,
For the good of us all. *Chorus:*

4. On the hill of Calvary –
Place to end all hope of living –
The most precious Word of Life
Breathed his last and died, forgiving,
For the good of us all. *Chorus:*

5. In a garden, just at dawn,
Near the grave of human violence,
The most precious Word of Life
Cleared his throat and ended silence,
For the good of us all. *Chorus:*

© (John Bell b. 1949 & Graham Bell 1958 – 2019)

Benediction

Lord, as we journey through Holy Week, help us recognize the height, breadth and depth of your love that took Jesus to Calvary and raised him on Easter Day. May we rejoice in your redemptive love, but keep in mind that was sin that made it necessary. And may the grace of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us evermore. Amen.