

**Service for Amblecote Wordsley Palm Sunday (StF)**  
**10.30a.m. 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2020.**

**Call to Worship: Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 to 11.**

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 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. There is a popular, but unsubstantiated legend that, on the eve of Palm Sunday 821, King Louis travelled to worship at Angers and, as he was passing the monastery, he heard a hymn sung beautifully and was so moved by it that he sent an aide to locate its source. When he discovered it was Theodulph, he released the Bishop at once and proclaimed that the hymn he had listened to should be sung not only upon that very Palm Sunday but on every one thereafter. I'm inclined to agree with the king's sentiments. Hymn number 262, 'All glory, laud and honour'.***

*Prayer*

Heavenly Father, today, on Palm Sunday, we come to you with awe and gratitude that you, who created all life throughout the universe, should care for sinful human beings so much that you gave your beloved Son, Jesus, to free us from our sins by dying on a cross of agony and shame at Calvary. As we journey through Holy Week, help us to see and hear with new awareness the story of Christ's passion and death and then of his glorious resurrection, next Sunday. Loving Lord, breathe your love into our lives, so we may love others even as you love us. Amazing God, all honour, glory, power and praise belong to you for evermore.

Faithful God, we thank and praise you for your love that has blessed us throughout our lives, for all that you have given us and done for us, but most of all for the willingness of your dear Son, Jesus, to die upon a cross for our sins.

Help us to respond to your grace and goodness by loving and serving our neighbours in your holy name.

Hear us, merciful God, as we confess our weakness and failings. Help us to live as we are called to live, in harmony with you and our neighbours. As we seek to change our ways, we ask you to forgive us for the sins we have committed and the good we have failed to do: for our foolishness and pride, our disobedience and self-centredness. Let us turn from the darkness of unrighteousness and seek the light of your love and truth once more.

Gracious Lord, you hear and answer our prayers, and, trusting that we have been pardoned, we ask you to strengthen us with the Holy Spirit and guide us with the perfect example of Jesus, so our lives may be evidence of our faith and a beacon to draw others to know and love our Saviour. Amen.

***The third verse of our next hymn, by Charles Wesley, provides a wonderful explanation of the idea of kenosis – God emptied out – in our reading from Philippians: “He left his Father’s throne above – / So free, so infinite his grace – / Emptied himself of all but love, / And bled for Adam’s helpless race.” We shall sing hymn number 345, ‘And can it be’***

*The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 21 verses 1 to 11*

**Address 1 Peter: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Matthew 21:9**

Shalom Chevarim, may the beauty and fullness of God’s blessing be upon you and those you love. Let me introduce myself: I am **Simon bar Jonas**, sometimes called **Peter or Cephas** – the ‘**rock**’ on which my Master, Jesus, said he would build his Church. The preacher has asked me to explain how my Master’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem seemed to have ended in total disaster within a week. Some 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.

We were travelling from Jericho to Jerusalem with Jesus, to celebrate Pessach, the festival you 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 us of God’s saving grace when he not only freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt but guided them to the Promised Land. When we retell the story of the Exodus, we find comfort and strength, for we know that the Lord did not

just create the world and then abandon it, but he actively seeks our wellbeing. I had already declared Jesus to be the Christ, God's anointed, because three years' discipleship taught me that he was far more than a great prophet, teacher and healer. His wisdom and power over nature and death were far beyond mortal gifts. After all, he raised our friend, Lazarus, four days after he had been placed in his tomb, after which time his body would have begun to decompose. We disciples were almost beside ourselves with excitement as we began our journey from the house at Bethany where Lazarus, Martha and Mary had been our hosts. We thought the great adventure was about to begin – well, it was, but it wasn't as we anticipated.

We were rather perplexed when Jesus told two of us to go to nearby Bethphage where they would find a young donkey tied up. They were to untie it and take it back to the Master, but if anybody challenged them, they were to say, **'The Lord needs it'**. Well, they were challenged, but when they gave the password, they were allowed to leave with the donkey. I thought it was a strange creature for the Messiah to ride on as he claimed his kingdom. After all, we thought he was going to drive out the Roman occupiers, restore Judea and Samaria to the wealth and political importance we Jews had known under King David. Oh yes, we expected him to bring us into a close relationship with Almighty God, Jehovah. Surely, I thought, he should have ridden into the city on a fine warhorse – preferably a grey charger – as befits a great king. However, we knew that the Pharisees and High Priests were plotting against the Master and the Roman garrison was always on high alert against rebellions during Passover, so we 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.

We put two outer garments on the young donkey helped Jesus onto its back, then walked by his side with other followers as we descended the hill by the Mount of Olives towards the entrance of the Holy City. We 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 our Master's 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 the Master was not having any more of their nonsense. He wanted

everyone to know he is the Messiah and he declared that if his followers were silent, then the very stones would testify to him.

***We shall sing a hymn that echoes the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem. We shall sing it through twice. Number 263, 'Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!'***

*We come to our prayer of intercession.*

God most gracious and holy, as we reflect upon our journey through Lent, we recognize your goodness and grace, for you have given us this remarkable, beautiful and self-sustaining world and have blessed our lives in so many ways that we know our response should be to serve our neighbours as your earthly hands, doing good as often as we can to as many people as we can. May the perfect example of Jesus, our Saviour be our guide in serving our neighbours and playing our part in building a better world.

Lord, we pray for the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and understanding may grow among the nations and peoples, for the governments of the nations, so peace and justice may be established and prevail. We pray for our enemies and those who wrong us that we may bear a Christian witness and offer peace for hostility and kindness for hatred.

Lord, in your mercy,

### **Hear our Prayer**

We pray for everybody who ministers to and cares for the suffering, the friendless and the needy, that they fulfil God's purposes in their work and outreach. We remember victims of the coronavirus COVID 19 and pray for their deliverance. Help them and us remember that you are with us in this time of trial, so we all may face an uncertain, even threatening future, with grounded hope.

We remember with gratitude all doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, care workers and kind-hearted volunteers in the United Kingdom who are putting themselves in harm's way as they seek to help Coronavirus patients and vulnerable members of society.

Loving Lord, hear our prayer for the NHS. May it receive the support it needs to heal its weaknesses and to grow to meet the changing needs of our society, especially with the challenge of COVID 19. We offer our thanks especially for the healing rendered at our local hospitals, Russells Hall and The Corbett, for our GPs and health workers in the community. Help them to cope with the pressures they are facing and may they find blessing and safety in their work.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our Prayer**

Loving Lord, inspire and guide governments, scientists, researchers and authorities as they seek to deal with the effects of COVID 19 and to protect their populations by their policies. Hear our prayer for countries that lack welfare systems to combat this virus, that international support will soon be forthcoming and let your blessing rest upon medical staff and scientists who are seeking to bring healing around the world.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our Prayer**

We remember people who are sick in body, mind or spirit, those bowed down by the pressures of life, failed relationships and bereavement, for all who live with a dementia and everybody who cares for their needs. In a time of silence, we bring our concerns to you, confident that, as we name them in our hearts, you will know their needs and reach out to them. ....

Gracious Lord, where it is possible let us be part of the answer of our prayer for those around us, by being sensitive to their needs and offering practical support.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our Prayer**

We pray for the whole Church of Christ, that professing one Lord, one faith and one baptism, all whom Christ has called may learn to live in the unity of the one Spirit and take Good News to all peoples. We pray for everybody who takes the gospel to the world that they are able to draw all-comers to Christ Jesus through their sincerity and boldness of spirit. And also to all who receive God's Word, that they may discover his holiness and glory.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our Prayer**

We thank you and praise you for all your saints and grant them the fullness of your eternal joy. Strengthen us by their fellowship, so we may follow their examples and guide other people to know and love Jesus.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our Prayer**

Abba, heavenly Father, we ask you to bless us, our friends and families. Keep us safe in your care. Help us to know and do your holy will, so we may bring the light

of your love to this sin-darkened and self-centred world, to the glory of Christ our Saviour. Amen.

*Address 2: Peter – The Passion of Christ*

When the Master rode into Jerusalem in triumph, I thought the revolution was imminent. Like the other followers, I believed he would free Jews from the power of Rome and establish a powerbase in Jerusalem, from which he would rule God's chosen people. We, of course, would share in his earthly glory. I 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 the passions of the people there.

Then at the supper we shared the following Thursday, he washed our feet like a low servant and when I protested, he told me that if I didn't allow him to wash mine, I could have no part in his kingdom. I was confused, so he told me I'd understand later. Later in the meal, the Master told me he would be betrayed and put to death, but would rise on the third day. I retorted that I'd die with him, but he said I would deny even knowing him three times on the night of his arrest. None of us thought he was being serious – we thought he was just testing our faith. None of us realised that Judas Iscariot had left the supper to betray our Lord.

By the end of the week, our faith had been sorely tested – and found wanting. Our Master was betrayed; the other disciples fled and went into hiding; I went to the Chief Priest Caiaphas' palace to see what was happening to Jesus and, yes, I was so afraid and confused by the Master's lack of resistance that I denied even knowing him; so I joined the others and only learned of Jesus' crucifixion from the womenfolk and young John, because none of us was willing to put ourselves at risk by going to Calvary.

We thought the great adventure was over: the Master crucified like a common criminal; the Good News postponed indefinitely. We cowered behind the closed doors of our house, terrified that Caiaphas' soldiers would discover us and that we'd share the Master's fate. All seemed lost; everything turned to dust and ashes. But it wasn't the end of the story, my friends. Come along next week and celebrate the turning point in human history when the darkness of crucifixion was dispelled – swept aside – by the light of Christ's resurrection. Come and listen to how Christ Jesus triumphed over sin and death for all our sakes. Alleluia! Shabbat Shalom! Amen.

We close our worship as we sing the hymn, 'When the Son of God hung, dying,'

**1. When the Son of God hung, dying**

**On a cross at Calvary,  
At its foot were women, sighing,  
Grieving at his agony.  
Scribes and High Priests vilified him,  
Sneering, 'Come down from the tree!'  
But one thief, who hung beside him,  
Pleaded, 'Lord, remember me!'**

**2. Jesus heard his supplication,  
Sensed the fear upon his face;  
Shared his pain and isolation;  
Thus he spoke these words of grace:  
'Though in sin you once were hardened,  
As your mortal end you face,  
Now through faith you have been pardoned  
And in heav'n shall find a place.'**

**3. Helplessly, we ask our Saviour  
From our sins to be set free,  
For we grieve at our behaviour –  
Ours the dying robber's plea.  
Through the cross we are forgiven;  
By Christ's blood we've been set free:  
Bonds of sin have all been riven –  
Jesus, Lord, remember me!**

**4. As friends turned to leave in sorrow –  
Jesus lying in his tomb –  
All seemed lost for their tomorrow,  
So they hid in bolted room.  
Yet in three days God had raised him –  
Folded grave clothes in the gloom –  
And bemused friends fell and praised him,  
Finding peace in that same room**

***M. Rider, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2011 – {based on “As the Lamb of God hung, dying”,  
but set to “What a friend”, HP 559}***