

Worship 28th March 2021

Aberlour Parish Church

Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Call to Worship

Let's follow in the way of the Prince of Peace,
And as we shout for Jesus on a donkey,
may our hearts be ready for peace,
and tamed in humility,
Let's worship God.

Prayer

Hosanna, we cry, Lord,
as you ride into the city,
heralded as messiah,
prophet and preacher,
carpenter become king.

Hosanna, we cry, Lord,
as we remember how you,
held the untouchable,
reached out to the unworthy
and turned tables and heads.

Hosanna, we cry, Lord,
as we watch it all go wrong,
as the palm branches wither,
as the atmosphere turns nasty,
as the cries of joy are silenced.

Save us, Lord.
And you did though it cost you everything.
And so we praise you, Lord,
not as the crowds did that day,
caught up in the excitement, anxious for a hero,
and ready to sell you out.
But as our creator God, choosing your moment,
so that nothing would ever be the same again.
As our loving Lord, choosing a cross.
As our Risen Lord, choosing us,
sacrificing all for us
so we might be your people for all time.

We want to follow you
but instead we remain standing
in the safety of our own world.
We hear the people call you
King and Redeemer and Lord
but instead we stay silent.
We know you are Messiah

but we abandon you to your fate
lest it costs us to take your side.

Forgive us, Lord,
especially on this day
when we glimpse our own faces in the crowd,
hear our own voices condemn,
know in our own hearts how we have hurt you.
Forgive us, Lord, and set us free to follow you
in the hard and relentless days ahead.

May we follow you, Jesus, palms in one hand
bread and wine in the other
hosannas in our throats
and questions on our minds,
trusting your love even as we hesitate at its cost.
May we follow you, Jesus,
there at the beginning right to the end.

Hosanna, Lord.
Amen.

Hymn

- 1 Hosanna, loud hosanna,
 the little children sang ;
 through city street and temple
 their joyful welcome rang.
 They shouted out their praises
 to Christ, the children's friend,
 who welcomes all with blessing,
 whose love will never end.
- 2 From Olivet they followed,
 a large exultant crowd,
 the victor palm branch waving,
 and chanting clear and loud ;
 bright angels joined the chorus,
 beyond the cloudless sky,
 'Hosanna in the highest !
 Glory to God on high ! '
- 3 'Hosanna in the highest ! '
 That ancient song we sing,
 for Christ is our Redeemer,
 the Lord of heaven our King.
 Oh, may we ever praise him
 with heart and life and voice,
 and in his living presence
 eternally rejoice.

Jennette Threlfall (1821–1880)(*alt.*)

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Reading – Luke 19:29-44

29When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” 39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

41As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. 44They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

Reflection

We often call today ‘Palm Sunday’ and – in a normal year – churches across the globe might exchange crosses made of palm leaves, or – as I remember from a visit to a church in California when I was 7 – have processions round the church waving palm branches. Palm branches on Palm Sunday to remember how the crowds waved and cheered Jesus into Jerusalem – full of hope and joy about this Messiah Man. Would he be their new king?

The thing is, in Luke’s telling of Jesus’ triumphal entry to Jerusalem, there are no Palm branches.

Cloaks put down, rejoicing, the donkey with the slightly mysterious story of it being fetched because ‘The Lord has need of it’, and the wonderful image that even if the crowds were silenced, the very stones would cry out – it seems all of creation is shouting to welcome Jesus to Jerusalem. All the other facets of the story that we’re used to, but no palm branches.

Why?

We’ve spoken before about how Luke’s account of the life of Jesus was among the latest of the four gospels to be assembled. One of the biggest clues to that is that it has lots of material from the other gospels, almost all of Mark, and it shares a good deal of the non-Mark material we find in Matthew. And Luke has some material more again, like for instance the nativity story. And it makes sense that Luke would be later, because later authors would be adding more each time.

But here Luke is taking something away – the palm leaves. And it seems puzzling why?

I think the answer lies part in Luke's context, and partly in a deeply importantly theological point being made about who Jesus is.

In terms of Luke's context, a huge and monumental thing has happened in his time that probably hadn't happened yet for the earlier gospel writers. In AD70 Jerusalem is destroyed, razed to the ground, by the Roman Empire. This event was catastrophic for first century Jews who witnessed their most important holy site, the Temple which sat at the heart of their understanding of faith, torn down. This is the destruction of the Temple that left the site as it remains today, with only the Western Wall still standing.

It's hard to fathom just how big a deal it was for first-century Judeans to witness this. The Temple signified the Judean religion and national identity. It was to them – just as it had been to Jewish Jesus- the centre and symbol of God's presence with God's people.

And so when we heard in the second part of our reading today that Luke's Jesus utter words of the woes that would come on Jerusalem – I have no doubt that Luke linked those words to the destruction of the temple. To the original audience of Luke's Gospel it would have been impossible to hear words of enemies crushing them to the ground and leaving no stone unturned, and not to think of the destruction of the Temple.

There was another important symbol for first century Judeans. It was a symbols they put on their coins, a symbol of their nationality and sense of who they are as a people. It was a symbol like Scots have in the Thistle, the Welsh have in the daffodil and leek, The Irish in the shamrock, and the English in the rose. And the symbol was a Palm Branch.

You see, in the other gospels when the people wave the Palm branches, they do so as a symbol of welcoming Jesus as a new King. As a religious but also political leader: a new King for the Judeans. Many would have hoped he'd come to free them of Roman occupation – to be in the mould of that original great Jewish Warrior King - a second King David. No wonder we're about to see one of the key themes that gets Jesus into trouble in the coming week has much to do with the idea of him being 'King of the Jews' – the crowds around him were projecting onto him their own hopes for political revolution.

Of course, with the destruction of the Temple, any hopes of that revolution passed very quickly. And so Luke's depiction of Jesus, more strikingly than the other gospels, doesn't dwell long in the imagery of Judean Nationalism – in fact it undercuts and subverts the idea of Jesus as a king in as many ways as are possible.

And so that's probably what's going on with the missing palm branches. It's Luke's way of telling us that this king Jesus is not a king in any worldly sense.

Of course there are other clues to that. What king rides chooses a donkey over a warrior horse?

But I said there was an important theological point here as well. And we see that in Jesus' reason for lamenting over Jerusalem. Jesus weeps for Jerusalem. He weeps, even amidst the joy and the crowds. And he weeps not so much for it's destruction as for this: "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

For Jesus it's *all* about peace.

Jerusalem, in Hebrew, literally means 'house of peace.' Of course, in Jesus' time and ours, the grim irony is how little peace Jerusalem has known.

You might know the Hebrew word for peace that gives Jerusalem its name: *shalom*. *Shalom* has a deeper and more fulsome meaning than we normally understand simply from the word 'peace'. *Shalom* is wholesome and full peace of body, soul, and mind, *shalom* is union with God, *shalom* is not private – just about me or you- but shared between persons and throughout communities, *shalom* is the way we are meant to be and what we are created for.

And Jesus *is* Shalom and comes that others might know *shalom*. Jesus on the back of the donkey is the Prince of Peace not a Warrior King.

And we'll see yet the violence this prince of peace endures. And we'll see how he still persists with his peace. And we'll see how peace has the victory, and how through Jesus God offers *shalom* for us all.

But for us today, the question is this: what do we expect of Jesus? And what do we want? Do we want to follow Jesus with or without the Palm branch?

Do we want a strong overthrower to make the world the way our politics and persuasions say it should be? TO pursue our interests for us?

Or are we willing to follow behind a donkey; looking ridiculous and idealistic as we call for peace and *shalom*?

Are we willing to follow where that path leads?

And to serve a Servant King?

Amen

Hymn

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.

*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.

3 Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

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.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

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Prayer

Lord God,

you cried over your people
and we cry with you.
For we know the road ahead,
its every pothole and place of ambush.
We know it is we who wait on the sidelines
and silently watch you slip by
on your way to the anguish
of a night's silent garden,
of a betrayer's wine-stained kiss,
of the shout of hammer on nail.

Lord God,

you cried over your world
and we cry with you.
For we know only too well
the hurt and despair,
the lack of peace and hunger for war.
Yet we know too
there is love and healing enough.
You showed it yourself
in your gentleness and compassion.
You said it yourself from a cross
and you proved it once and for all
in an empty tomb
just when the world believed
it was all empty words.

Promised Messiah,
visit the desperate places.
King of kings,
give strength to the powerless places.
Living Word,
walk in the lifeless places.
Servant saviour,
tend in the needy places.
Rejected sufferer,
comfort in the painful places.
Death defeater,
bring wholeness and healing
to all places.
And start here, Lord, among us.

Amen

Hymn

- 1 Ride on ! ride on in majesty !
Hark ! all the tribes 'Hosanna !' cry ;
O Saviour meek, pursue thy road
with palms and scattered garments strowed.
- 2 Ride on ! ride on in majesty !
In lowly pomp ride on to die ;
O Christ, thy triumphs now begin
o'er captive death and conquered sin.
- 3 Ride on ! ride on in majesty !
The wingèd squadrons of the sky
look down with sad and wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.
- 4 Ride on ! ride on in majesty !
Thy last and fiercest strife is nigh ;
the Father on his sapphire throne
awaits his own anointed Son.
- 5 Ride on ! ride on in majesty !
In lowly pomp ride on to die ;
bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
then take, O God, thy power, and reign.

Henry Hart Milman (1791–1868)

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Blessing

Palms have been waved,
cloaks spilled on the ground,
voices have been lifted in song,
and Jesus has been welcomed into the city.
The week lies ahead of us,
times of servanthood and symbolism
as feet are washed and bread is broken,
and the cross looms ahead of us.
May we walk with Passion,
along Jesus' Way.