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PALM SUNDAY B

28th March 2021

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Call to worship

Still our minds, O God,
And focus our hearts on you.
Open us up, that the words we say and hear,
The songs we sing and listen to,
The prayer we share together,
Might enable us to encounter your Spirit again today. Amen.¹

Hymn: 44 STF – Come on and celebrate - [YouTube](#)

Opening Prayers

Today, we celebrate the triumphal entry of a king into Jerusalem:

A king, the like of which we have never seen before
A king, riding on a donkey
A king, put to death in our place, and raised up so we may have eternal life
A king who knows each of us by name, and loves us beyond all understanding.
Lord Jesus, we come before you in humility to offer our praise, and ourselves to your service.

May we grow closer to you, know more of you, and learn to follow in your footsteps.

Amen.²

Let us now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 - [Click for Reading](#)

Mark 11:1-11- [Click for Reading](#)

Reflections on the readings

In the early 1580s, or so the story goes, Walter Raleigh, the dashing and well-dressed adventurer and poet, lay down his coat over a puddle so that Queen Elizabeth I could walk over it without getting her royal feet damp.

Is that a true story? Historians think probably not. But I'm not sure that really matters. Something about that flamboyant gesture is so compelling that even today it remains

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers from Emma Dobson

an essential anecdote about the Tudors, offering an enticing insight into the relationship between the Queen and a dashing gentleman at court.

What is it about laying down a coat that tells us so much about the relationship between the two people involved?

Your coat is really quite important. A coat provides warmth and protection. For Walter Raleigh it might also have been expensive and stylish too – a status symbol. His laying down something precious for his Queen was a public statement of the high regard in which he held her.

In our Gospel reading today we see not just one person laying down a coat, but crowds of people laying down their cloaks in the road as Jesus rides through on a donkey into Jerusalem. Even the disciples put their cloaks over the donkey for Jesus to sit on.

There are lots of different players in this scene that Mark paints for us. There are the disciples who go on their strange mission to borrow a donkey; there are the donkey owners who for some reason agree to lend their colt to total strangers; there are the crowds of people singing and laying down cloaks and palm leaves. And at the centre of all this action is Jesus, surrounded by people who are celebrating his triumphant journey into Jerusalem. Each one of them making a gesture of submission and praise in his honour. This is a cacophony of worship.

All of this, of course, is fulfilling the promise in Zechariah 9:9:

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

There are two narratives at play here on Palm Sunday, summed up in this prophecy from Zechariah; one is that Jesus is King, righteous and victorious. In contrast to this, there is a more subversive narrative; Jesus is lowly. He is riding on a humble donkey, not exactly a status symbol.

The Jewish crowds celebrating Jesus' arrival would have been praying for a messiah for the here and now, to overthrow Roman rule and to bring justice and peace. They might even have expected war and violence. But the donkey is an animal that historically symbolises peace. Jesus is not coming to establish power in the ways that people expected; through wrath and vengeance and violence. Jesus is subverting what power looks like.

Of course, we know what happens next in the events of Holy Week. We know that the crowds will turn against Jesus, and that God's love, grace and mercy will not be revealed through a military display or through bringing down the Roman Empire. Instead, God's great act of love will see his Son scorned and rejected and crucified. Jesus demonstrates love and power through humility and frailty.

And yet, we also know how this whole story ends. We know that in the power of the cross comes the promise of eternal life. We know that God's love cannot be extinguished or diminished. Palm Sunday isn't a false promise, Jesus' last hurrah before crucifixion. Instead, Palm Sunday is a foretaste of the glorious morning of resurrection, and a preview of the new heaven and new earth that is still to come.

The lowly subversion of power that we see in Jesus on the donkey is a power far greater than the violent oppressive power of any empire.

The events of Palm Sunday remind us of the role we have to play in all of this. We are called to worship Jesus even when this puts us at odds with the narratives the world feeds us about power and strength.

Perhaps the challenge for us this Palm Sunday is this reminder that God subverts what we think of as important. We live in a world that tells us that wealth, security, power, status and beauty are what we should be worshipping.

As we join the crowds of people welcoming in a lowly messiah on a donkey, is it time for us to put some of this aside?

As we journey together to the end of Lent, many of us will have given up things we love and will be looking forward to having them again. That first bite of chocolate or glass of wine are just around the corner! However, maybe today God is asking you to give up other things, perhaps more long term.

What is distracting your attention from Jesus? Lay it down at his feet. What is it that you have put your worth in? Lay it down at the feet of Jesus. What is it that is telling you you're not good enough? Lay it down at his feet.

Just like the owners of the donkey giving up a precious animal or the crowds of people laying down their own cloaks for Jesus, we too are called to lay down things that are precious to us at the feet of Jesus.

What is God asking you to lay down today?

This may sound like a great effort, but be encouraged: the people praising Jesus by laying down their cloaks on that first Palm Sunday rejoiced on impulse, moved by the beauty and majesty of Christ. We too are invited to enter in Jesus' presence. To be moved by his beauty and his majesty so that our hearts are stirred into action.

This Holy Week, as we journey to the cross and beyond to resurrection, my prayer for each one of us is that we might experience in ourselves this heartfelt celebration of Christ, singing in our own way: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"³

³ Reflection by Emma Dobson

What are you being called to?

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

[Pause].

Which communities of people do you feel a particular call to live among?

What do you learn about Jesus' character from his ministry alongside people?

Let us pray,

Jesus, we learn so much from you from your ministry alongside people. In the quiet, we bring to mind something of your character and ask that we too may learn to be like you. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Holy God,

You sent your Son into the world to live among us and minister to us, so that each of us may know you and have life in all its fullness. Jesus offers us unity and unconditional love, and yet, in our world, the lives of some are still valued above the lives of others. Power is abused and wealth is hoarded by the few.

Today, we offer you our prayers for this world, and for the people in need of your light.

We pray for all those whose voices have been silenced. For people of colour facing prejudice and unfair treatment due to systemic racism. For members of the LGBTQ+ community, many of whom still feel they must hide their authentic selves. For women across the world who are objectified, undervalued and under appreciated.

May we learn to listen to the stories of those who have been silenced, rather than speaking for them.

Strengthen us to do all we can to help create a world where all have a seat at the table, and where all are truly seen.

We pray for victims of all kinds of abuse, and pray for a world where all can feel safe in the place they call home. We give thanks for the people who work hard to support victims of abuse, ensuring they can come forward in safety and confidence to share their stories.

We pray for all struggling with health challenges, both physical and mental, and we ask for comfort and hope for their loved ones. In a moment of silence, we bring before you those known to us, who are in need of your loving presence at this time:

[Silence]

Loving God, gather up the names spoken into the silence, and accept all of the prayers we offer today. Help us to be the hands, feet and voice of Jesus in this world, in all the ways we can.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.⁴

Hymn: 665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord - [YouTube](#)

⁴ Taken from The Second Intercessions Handbook by John Pritchard

Blessing

As we head into Holy Week, we travel with you Lord Jesus.
As we reflect on the story of your death, we lament and grieve,
And as we await the moment of resurrection, we protect and share our hope – our hope in you.

Come amongst us, Easter God. Amen.⁵

⁵ Additional prayers by Tim Baker