

twelvebaskets



PALM SUNDAY A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Palm Sunday - Year A
2nd April 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

271 STF – Come, wounded Healer OR

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

263 STF – Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest! OR

265 STF – Ride on, ride on in majesty!

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Matt 27:11-54

Hymn:

277 STF – My song is love unknown OR

284 STF – There is a green hill far away

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

657 STF – You give rest to the weary OR

638 STF – Through all the changing scenes of life

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

347 STF – Crown him with many crowns OR

415 STF – The Church of Christ, in every age

Blessing

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Call to worship

Let us come into worship, shouting our hosannas.

Let us come into church, singing our songs of praise.

Let us come into the presence of Jesus the Christ, giving thanks for our Messiah.

Come amongst us, by your Spirit, Holy God.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

271 STF – Come, wounded Healer OR

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day

Opening Prayers

Here we come Lord, waving our banners and shouting your name in praise.

Here we come Lord, joining in because we feel we should, feeling a little timid and scared and frightened after a difficult week, and with all the fear of the week to come.

Here we come Lord, experiencing all the range of human emotions, but gathered on this Palm Sunday to worship you.

Here we come Lord, your people, seeking to know more of you, to receive the courage and forgiveness and hope we need for the week ahead.

Come amongst us, by your Spirit, we pray.

On this Palm Sunday, we come to lay down the palm-branches and coats of our sins and shame at your feet, even as you ride into our lives again. We come to say sorry Lord, and ask that you would forgive us our sins and set us free again. Take a moment to say that prayer in a way that is helpful to you this day.

[Pause]

Thank you Lord, that you have already forgiven us and set us free. Hallelujah!

On this Palm Sunday, we come also to worship, to give you our thanks and praise – not because you need our worship, or require our gratitude, but because we know we have been richly blessed, and we seek to turn the glory back to you.

As we come, as we give thanks, as we sing and pray and listen and praise, may you be at work in our hearts, emboldening us with the radical good news of love's great victory over hate, and the part we can play in bringing the light into the darkness.

Let your light shine through us Lord, this Palm Sunday.

Let your light shine, amongst the hosannas and the mocking voices,

Amongst the betrayals and the denials,

Amongst the quiet meals with friends and the loud crowds with anger in their hearts.

At the foot of the cross, and in the garden of the empty tomb,

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

In all that this week will bring, let your light shine, Lord God,
Easter God.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Who has experienced hearing a spoiler about something? For example, you may have been watching a tv show, and someone tells you what happens next. Or maybe you have a book, and you jump straight to the last chapter to see how it ends. That is what a spoiler is.

Well, in the Bible, we see spoilers take place. Those spoilers are often found in the Old Testament. The spoilers in the Old Testament speak about Jesus.

Around 500 years earlier the prophet Zechariah had prophesied that Israel would overcome her enemies... and in the middle of that prophecy came this verse: "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9) Jesus' followers had spent three years hearing him teach, seeing him perform miracles and telling them to keep quiet about the fact that he was the Messiah, the Chosen One sent to free Israel. Here at last, for all to see, Jesus went public.

No wonder they celebrated. For the crowds who were not yet his followers and who were living under Roman occupation, longing for freedom, here was Jesus acting out the prophecy that said... "I am the king who will bring victory" No wonder they were excited!

This picture of Jesus tells us what sort of King He would become. Jesus came on a colt, the animal of a man of peace, not on a war horse, the animal of a conquering king. Unfortunately, the crowd were so intent on welcoming a Messiah, that they paid little attention to that part of Jesus' message. They wanted Jesus to be the one who overthrew the Romans. But Jesus' message, by riding on a colt, was clear to those who wanted to see it... "I come in peace."

The crowd didn't pick up on the spoiler. Jesus was a different sort of King, one of peace.

That's the Jesus we can follow today.

Let us pray, will you say these words after me:

Prince of Peace,
as we remember how you came into Jerusalem,
may we bring that same energy of peace.

Amen.³

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Hymn:

263 STF – Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest! OR

265 STF – Ride on, ride on in majesty!

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Matt 27:11-54

Hymn:

277 STF – My song is love unknown OR

284 STF – There is a green hill far away

Reflections on the readings

Jill Baker shares for us some of her reflections on how today's lectionary speaks to her.

'Open to me the gates of righteousness', cries the psalmist... and as I hear those words, especially on Palm Sunday, certain images come to my mind... I wonder what pictures they create for you?

- If you are a fan of 'The Lord of the Rings', you may see Aragorn forcing open the mighty gates of Helm's Deep.
If 'Frozen' is more your thing, then you will be singing along with Elsa and Anna as the gates of Arendelle are finally opened after years of shutting the sisters in – or shutting the world out.
- If your cultural tastes include Stainer's 'Crucifixion' then it will be the chorus 'The procession to Calvary' with its repeated phrase, 'Fling wide the gates' which becomes your ear worm.
- Perhaps you or someone you know has served a prison sentence and knows what it is to focus every hope and thought on the day when those gates will be opened to allow release.

We have gates to keep things in and we have gates to keep things out and the opening and closing of gates plays a part in our lives in all sorts of ways... Maybe we can talk about the opening of gates that have been important to us after the service.

The old city of Jerusalem is today surrounded by a wall which contains 8 gates; although one, the Gate of Mercy, also known as the Eastern Gate or Golden Gate, is now also a solid wall and is said by Jews to be awaiting a miraculous opening when the Messiah comes and the dead are raised. The gate was blocked off in the early 16th Century when the present walls were built by the Turkish Sultan 'Suleiman the Magnificent'. But Jerusalem has been a walled city since its earliest appearance in the bible around 1200 years previously, when David captured it by leading his army in through the drains, because the walls were impregnable.

Gates in walls are always important because they are places of entry and exit and places of encounter. Often, as in many Old Testament stories, gates are the places where justice is done, where trade takes place, where deals and bargains are made.

Gates make good places to beg and hope and wish. Walls and gates are very significant in the religious history of Jerusalem and perhaps that makes our familiar Palm Sunday story even more dramatic and wonderful.

With only a few days of his life on earth remaining, Jesus rides into the city of Jerusalem, most probably entering by the very gate which is now closed off, the Eastern or Golden Gate, the Gate of Mercy! We picture the scene year by year, and again images spring to mind:

- Shots from Jesus Christ Superstar or other dramatic and cinematic portrayals of the life of Jesus may play before our eyes;
- Perhaps we have been involved in Palm Sunday processions through our own streets, or in other lands – sometimes with real donkeys and all the fun that brings!
- Some here may have been to the Passion Play in Oberammergau and seen this story enacted on the vast stage there.
- Others may have been to Jerusalem and can visualise the events in that context.

On Palm Sunday 2017, I joined around 10,000 others from all over the world to meet at the top of the Mount of Olives and follow the route Jesus probably took into the city – although of course we had to enter not by the Golden Gate but by the Lion Gate.

Today as we meet here, that will be happening again in Jerusalem as Christians from many lands take the opportunity to show solidarity with the tiny Christian population of Palestine on this special day. With such a vast crowd in such a tiny city, singing, shouting, waving palm branches and palm crosses, following bands and choirs and ministers and priests of every denomination, amidst a plethora of national flags from many lands it was total chaos... perhaps not unlike the first Palm Sunday which we mark today!

On that occasion, as Matthew tells us, Jesus approached the city gates on a humble donkey and as he did so the resounding cries of Psalm 118 ring loud in our ears...

- 'Open to me the gates of righteousness',
- 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord',
- 'Hosanna'!

That word Hosanna probably meant 'Save us' initially, but it becomes mixed up with a shout of praise as well – it is a cry which recognises two things; a need for help and that Jesus is the one who can meet that need. Matthew tells us it is a very large crowd and again images come to my mind... a picture of the whole world crowded around a gate crying out for help, for life, for goodness, for salvation...

What then can we do on this Palm Sunday in 2023, when the world, in all sorts of ways, is indeed crying out for help, crying out to be saved, but maybe doesn't look to Jesus to open the gates of salvation? Can we be a people who open those gates – both for ourselves and for others?

Looking at the story as Matthew tells it to us; we see that the crowds did three things:

Firstly, they cut branches from trees and used them to welcome Jesus. The waving of branches was an integral part of the ancient Jewish Festival of Tabernacles, referred to as the psalm we heard declares, 'Bind up the festal procession with branches...'. Matthew's original readers will have made the connection between branches and worship and recognise that this man riding humbly on a donkey is one to be worshipped.

Worship can be a gate-opening experience! When we offer ourselves to God in worship something happens which speaks of the presence and the glory of God and can open the gates of people's hearts.

Secondly the crowd shouted 'Hosanna, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'. They recognised that Jesus was the one they needed. Sometimes the gates which have to be opened are the gates with which we fence ourselves off from any sort of need. The culture of today can lead us to think we must be strong, we must be perfect, we must be self-sufficient and able to cope with anything.

But the truth is that we are not supposed to live like that – we are supposed to live in relationship with a God who will supply all our needs – if we recognise that we have them. Shouting 'Hosanna' today is one way to open those gates and let God into our lives.

Thirdly, the crowd answered questions & pointed others to Jesus too. When the whole city, in turmoil, asks 'Who is this?' the crowds replied 'This is Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee'.

Put like that it sounds easy, but we're not always very good at doing it... at answering questions openly, being willing to say 'It's Jesus who makes the difference in my life. Come and meet him.' That too can open gates for our friends and neighbours.

On this Palm Sunday, let's open the gates we find in ourselves and open gates for others too so that the King of glory can enter in!

Let us pray:

God of the gateway, we worship you today, recognising that you are worthy of all we can offer. Open something in us, free us to worship you in spirit and truth.

Jesus Christ who, by your death and resurrection, opened the gates to salvation for all, we worship you today, recognising that we need you. We can't make it on our own after all.

Holy Spirit, mediator and energiser, come amongst us, come amongst our friends and family, that gates may be opened and lives transformed by your power and to the glory of God.

Amen.

Questions for discussion or further reflection *[You may wish to break people into small groups and give them 5-10 minutes to discuss these questions or, if you have a small congregation, you might like to discuss them as a whole group, perhaps arranging the seating to allow people to converse more easily].*

- Have there been gates which have been significant in your life? In what ways?
- Palm Sunday is a day to show solidarity with other Christians around the world; how can you do that from where you live?
- Do you sometimes feel that you have to be perfect and strong and self-sufficient all the time? How does it feel to reflect that perhaps God wants us to express our need for help?
- Think about your friends and family members who don't worship. Are there ways you could open gates for them?⁴

[After the conversation, pause for a moment to allow people to reflect on all they have said and heard, then introduce the next hymn].

Hymn:

657 STF – You give rest to the weary OR

638 STF – Through all the changing scenes of life

Prayers of intercession

God, as we enter Holy Week, we thank you for the freedom we have to worship, the safety and the protection that we are granted through the laws of our country to learn about and proclaim your name freely.

May we never take for granted the opportunity we have to openly declare the good news in the places you have called us to be. We pray for those without that opportunity, for those meeting in secret, who risk their lives simply by worshipping you. Sustain and protect those who worship you today in places of threat and danger, may they know that they are in the prayers of your people.

God, as we enter Holy Week, we pray for our leaders, for those called to shepherd your flock, may they know you ever more deeply. Grant them wisdom and discernment as they strive to lead us into being the Church that you have called us to be.

As they go out day by day and week by week, we pray that they would be filled to overflowing by your spirit. We pray also for the leaders of our country, may your voice be heard in their discussions, may your heart be witnessed in their actions and may your will be done through them.

Strengthen those in government who know you, give them courage to speak up and step out, we pray that through their witness others will come to know you.

God, as we enter Holy Week, we pray for those we know who are suffering. We pray that to those living in darkness you would provide light, to the hurting that you would provide healing, and to the mourning that you would provide comfort.

Thank you that, in your very nature, you care about us and understand our pain, worries and fears, this week we pray that you would open our hearts to encountering you more closely than we ever have before.

⁴ Reflection written by Jill Baker

As we journey through this week and encounter the confusion of Thursday, the darkness of Friday and the hopelessness of Saturday may we hold firmly to the joy, hope and certainty of Sunday.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

And so we bring our gifts and our thanks to you, gracious God.
As the crowds laid their coats before you, so we lay down all that we have, for your glory and the building of your Kingdom, here on earth.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

347 STF – Crown him with many crowns OR

415 STF – The Church of Christ, in every age

Blessing

We go out into the week ahead, knowing there will be moments of doubt,
Stories of pain,
Even signs of betrayal and denial,
But we know too that you are here with us,
In this most holy of weeks,
And that resurrection is on the horizon.
Let us go out, and live the story, in your name,

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker