

Order of Service for 5th April 2020 Palm Sunday

Lift High the Cross

Welcome to our service for Palm Sunday. It's a real joy to be able to lead our service today, and a real sadness not to be in the church building with you all.

Normally today we'd have a palm cross to lift as we sing *Lift High the Cross*. You might like to pause and find some sort of cross now - or even make a simple one from a sheet of card or paper. I've an idea you might want it when we come to our closing hymn.

One of our principal readings today is Psalm 118 with its line, *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*. So we call each other to worship by sharing in a repeated line from it's opening verses. And yes, please join in in the obvious way!

Let David our minister say: **His love endures forever!**

Let all the people at home say: **His love endures forever!**

We give thanks to the Lord for he is good and say again together:

His love endures forever! Amen.

But let's hear now a reading from Matthew's gospel to set the scene for our worship.

First Reading

Matthew 21: 1 - 11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'

4 This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

5 'Say to Daughter Zion,

 "See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
 and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

'Hosanna[b] to the Son of David!'

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?'

11 The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Song

Make Way

Make way, make way, for Christ the King
In splendour arrives.

Fling wide the gates and welcome him
Into your lives.

Make way! (Make way!)

Make way! (Make way!)

For the King of kings!

(For the King of kings!)

Make way! (Make way!)

Make way! (Make way!)

And let his kingdom in!

He comes the broken hearts to heal,

The prisoners to free.

The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,

The blind shall see.

Make way! (Make way!)

Make way! (Make way!)

For the King of kings!

(For the King of kings!)

Make way! (Make way!)

Make way! (Make way!)

And let his kingdom in!

And those who mourn with heavy hearts,

Who weep and sigh;

With laughter, joy and royal crown

He'll beautify.

Make way! (Make way!)

Make way! (Make way!)

For the King of kings!

(For the King of kings!)

Make way! (Make way!)

Make way! (Make way!)

And let his kingdom in!

We call you now to worship him

As Lord of all.

To have no other gods but him:

Their thrones must fall!

Make way! (Make way!)
Make way! (Make way!)
For the King of kings!
(For the King of kings!)
Make way! (Make way!)
Make way! (Make way!)
And let his kingdom in!

Prayer

And now a Palm Sunday prayer from India

Jesus, King of the Universe,
ride on in humble majesty:
Lord, this Palm Sunday may I recognise in you the Lord who comes to his world, and join
with full heart in the children's 'Hosanna'.

Ride on, through conflict and debate,
ride on through sweaty prayer and betrayal of friends.

Lord, this Palm Sunday forgive me my evasions of truth,
my carelessness of your honour;
my weakness which leaves me sleeping even while in others you suffer and are anguished;
my cowardice that does not risk the consequences of publicly acknowledging you as Lord.

Ride on to the empty tomb and your rising in triumph;
Ride on to raise up your church, a new body for your service;
Ride on king Jesus, to renew the whole earth in your image;
in compassion come to help us.
Amen

And we say the Lord's prayer
Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come; your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our sins
as you forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.
Now and forever. Amen.

Behind Closed Doors

This week **Alan Pritchard** shares how he's getting on behind closed doors.

As I'm thinking here, and wondering what to say, I realise that I haven't left the house, or garden actually, for eleven days; by the time you get this it will be even longer! It doesn't seem like long when I put it like that, but it has still been a strain. I've had periods of "houseboundness" before, after my many operations. Most recently last April saw me incarcerated for a few weeks. The difference was though, that I had many visitors and well wishers at the door and in the room with me, and actual physical danger was not lurking outside. This time I've only spoken to loved ones through the front window, neighbours over the back garden fence, and other family via the wonders of Zoom!

It goes without saying that this is a very weird time; weird and difficult. At least I'm not alone. Jackie's here and she is by far the more resilient of the two of us. This morning she actually said that she was pleased at first because she could finish certain tasks – painting, sewing, sorting. I think the novelty is wearing off a bit, but she is still remarkably good at reminding me that we could be a lot worse off. It's true, we certainly could be. We have had shopping done for us – Chris the first time, and Diane, my sister the next. We really have got everything that we need in that respect.

I'm not sure what rules there might be about how to cope in situations like this, it's all very new to us. I've heard different voices on the radio suggesting routine, and being as close to normality as possible as being a way to survive. This is why we listen to the Hearsall service at the right time, and why we have coffee, and attempt the crossword, at just about the same time every day, with a biscuit, (just the one, ginger for me, and dark chocolate digestive for the boss). We've also tried to have a plan. Each night Jackie seems to ask me what I will be doing tomorrow. So far I've sorted out a few folders from our filing cabinet (horrible job!); replaced the heavy wooden swing seat on the swing that my Dad built out of scaffolding for Jackie's birthday when Fran was born (I know some of you have had a go on it, and marvelled at its magnificence); spent time sorting out seeds and getting raised beds and pots and tubs ready for what I hope will be a bumper crop of salad leaves, beans, onions, pumpkins, a few potatoes, and some tomatoes if Rog can find a way to deliver the plants that he's growing for me. I've never been this well organised. I've doubled my exercise routine too, I know that's important – ten minutes a day probably still isn't enough! I've been home-schooling Jackie as well. A wonderfully amusing and rewarding job. Yesterday it was Geography, today, who knows what will crop up. To be fair it has been a two-way process, she has taught me things too.

To get through this, and to keep some measure of sanity, I'm going to communicate as much as I can with the outside world. Part of my next plan is to e-mail all of the people I've been meaning to contact over the last few years, but haven't. I think I should reflect more, both on the situation that we find ourselves in – locally and globally, and on the higher more spiritual elements of life. Jackie and I both took part in the WhatsApp bible study last week, communication and reflection. I am also going to continue listening in to our Sunday "broadcasts", with alacrity.

Stay safe everyone.

We're going to sing a hymn now that strengthened Hearsall spirits in the wartime years. It's great to hear John playing for us on this song this morning.

Hymn

In heav'nly love abiding,
No change my heart shall fear;
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here.
The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid,
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?

Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim;
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.

Green pastures are before me,
Which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me,
Where darkest clouds have been.
My hope I cannot measure,
My path to life is free;
My Savior has my treasure,
And He will walk with me.

Prayer of intercession

This week's prayers for the world were written by Derek Noel, and on the sound file are read by Andy Thompson.

Lord it is to you we turn in times of fear and disquiet. You know our concerns for our friends , for our world and its future. Help us to pray in hope; help us to pray in sincerity knowing that you are in control even when all seems loss and despair.

We pray for all who bear great burdens of responsibility; for politicians who have to make decisions that may affect the future of millions of people. We pray for managers and directors in commerce and industry. We pray for all whose livelihoods are threatened because their business is under threat and for those who can no longer work.

We pray for those who are working to relieve hunger in poor families; for workers in food banks and emergency feeding centres. Lord, bless the work of your Church as it ministers to those who have lost loved ones . Give to all ministers words that help and heal . Give them true sympathy and enable all to see your light even in the greatest darkness.

We pray for all involved in the Health Service – for doctors, nurses, paramedics, ambulance men and women , porters, cooks and cleaners.

We pray for all who are fearful of the future , those who are ill, their relatives and friends. May they know that there are arms that hold them even in times of deepest distress.

We pray for your world Lord; that this time may be a means of uniting nations to lasting peace and security for all people.

So Lord, may the love of Christ move in our hearts and lives to your glory and praise
Amen

Offering

We pray together: Thank you Lord for your generous heart, and for giving us all a world of rich plenty and great beauty. Teach us to share our wealth, possessions and time with a happy heart and a good grace. Take the gifts we offer to our church and to others and use them all to make your kingdom come. Amen.

Second Reading

Psalm 118

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

2 Let Israel say:
'His love endures for ever.'

3 Let the house of Aaron say:
'His love endures for ever.'

4 Let those who fear the Lord say:
'His love endures for ever.'

5 When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord;
he brought me into a spacious place.

6 The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?

7 The Lord is with me; he is my helper.
I look in triumph on my enemies.

8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in humans.

9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in princes.

10 All the nations surrounded me,
but in the name of the Lord I cut them down.

11 They surrounded me on every side,
but in the name of the Lord I cut them down.

12 They swarmed around me like bees,
but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns;

in the name of the Lord I cut them down.
13 I was pushed back and about to fall,
but the Lord helped me.
14 The Lord is my strength and my defence;
he has become my salvation.

15 Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:
'The Lord's right hand has done mighty things!
16 The Lord's right hand is lifted high;
the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!'
17 I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the Lord has done.
18 The Lord has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.
19 Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.
20 This is the gate of the Lord
through which the righteous may enter.
21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

22 The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
23 the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes.
24 The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.

25 Lord, save us!
Lord, grant us success!

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
From the house of the Lord we bless you.

27 The Lord is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

29 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

Sermon

Lift High the Cross

How do we carry on in a time of crisis? Psalm 118 helps. It looks back to a time of military crisis and celebrates God's past victory. I noticed eight things it offers to us right now.

1. Join in the Song!
2. Respect the spiritual!
3. Remember the BUTS!
4. Refine the heart!
5. Enter the gates!
6. Learn the proverb!
7. Salute the Saviour!
8. Make it personal!

In fact there's a ninth: Lift High the Cross!

Join in the song!

This psalm was to celebrate the victory of a king! It begins with an invitation to join in the great song of Praise. Look at vs 1-4.

A leader declares: *His love endures forever!*

The lay people declare: *His love endures forever!*

The priests declare: *His love endures forever!*

Everyone declares: *His love endures forever!*

However we feel, we are invited to join in a song that's been sung for thousands of years.

Give thanks to the Lord! His love endures forever.

Respect the spiritual

The victorious king drew some surprising lessons from his time on the battlefield... *It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in humans...* Some allies will help us. There are good people and bad people. People come and go. But God remains the same.

Whatever crisis we face, a Christian puts God first in their considerations.

Remember the Buts

In verses 10 - 13 we get the four great BUTS! if you'll excuse my language... See what I mean:

All the nations surrounded me

BUT *in the name of the Lord I cut them down.*

They surrounded me on every side

BUT *in the name of the Lord I cut them down.*

They swarmed around me like bees

BUT *they were consumed like burning thorns*

I was pushed back and about to fall

BUT *the Lord helped me!*

This is a powerful formula for us to use personally and across the world. The Lord's presence is a great **BUT** in the spokes of evil's wheels.

Refine the heart!

This is a time to learn... As the king muses on the past he acknowledges how grim things became with a fifth BUT...

*The Lord has severely chastened me **BUT** he has not given me over to death.*

We get a sense of how close to death he might have come. But the king has sensed God refining his character through the suffering he has experienced. And we can look back on past crises and recall how God shaped our character through them.

Enter the Gates

This was a processional Psalm and at this point in the liturgy the king and his entourage have reached the gates of the Temple forecourt. Previously they were singing on their journey; now they come to the threshold of the temple.

Open for me the gates of the righteous...

In entering the Temple the King acknowledges that his authority comes from God alone. He submits before a higher authority with great joy in his heart.

Learn the Proverb

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone!

David had been rejected as a mere shepherd boy, but he became the cornerstone of the nation. We may feel like a bit of old rubble, but God has a way of making something even out of nothing...

Salute the Saviour

Lord, save us, exclaim the crowds in verse 25. To shout *Lord Save us! Or Hosanna!* Was a way of praising God for past salvations and trusting him for future ones. So Hosanna means *Praise God* and also *Help us again Lord*.

Make it Personal

At the end of the Psalm ordinary people are invited to speak in the first person. They take their boughs and join in the festal procession. They wave them and proclaim:

*You are **MY** God, and I will praise you.*

*You are **MY** Lord and I will exalt you.*

Now this Psalm had a life of its own. It was used on great occasions of celebration over the centuries and became part of the great Hallel Psalms sung at times of gatherings for national festivals in Jerusalem. It's still used by Jewish communities around the world today, and especially at Passover time.

So as well as looking back to God's deliverance of and through King David, it was used to look forward to a coming king, to a Messiah. God saved us in the past; he will save us in the future; he will save us right now!

At Hearsall Baptist we can apply this principle. God has saved us through past crises; he will save us again now.

An incendiary bomb fell on the roof of the building **BUT** it was extinguished.

We were afraid in the air raid shelter, **BUT** we sang *In Heavenly Love Abiding!*

A nation attacked us, **BUT** in the name of the Lord we cut them off!

And so we trust that God will rescue us today.

Now lines from this Psalm were sung as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It would have been in the air, seasonal, festival music like hearing carols sung at Sainsburys in December.

But everyone sensed the meaning it carried! Perhaps here now **IS** the Messiah, the one who will usher in new national victories against the Romans and other foes... The great day of God's victory had arrived.

So we have the familiar hosannas and branch-waving scene. And if you were making a film of the story, you might have wanted to end it here. The victorious king comes riding in peace into Jerusalem! Everybody cheers and shouts. What a happy climax to the story of Jesus!

But, as political leaders may be telling us today, it had to get worse before it could get better. King David saved his kingdom by escaping death on the battlefield. King Jesus saves his kingdom by going through death itself.

The great cry of *Hosanna, Save us Lord!* is a cry that proclaims God's ability to save us even from sin and death. But at this moment in the story, many people didn't realise how bad it would have to get before it could get better. Jesus would die and then rise again.

In the coronavirus outbreak, things can seem very, very bleak. Some of us have significant underlying health conditions and are desperate to avoid infection. Some of us are living alone, desperate for a hug. Some of us have put our work on hold, desperate about our job security. Some of us have paused a business, desperate for a chance to restart some day. Some of us are trapped abroad, desperate to return home.

I once knew a Christian English teacher and she commented on some new Christian song which included the line, *I'm desperate for your love*. She didn't like the use of the word *desperate*, because it is rooted in the notion of despair...

We may despair that our child will ever reconnect with us... We may despair that we'll ever be able to play the violin... We may even despair of our chances to live through a sickness BUT we need never despair of the love of God.

At the end of the Last supper the disciples sang a hymn and went out into the night. They probably sang Psalm 118, which was and is integral to the Passover liturgy. *Let all Israel say, His love endures forever.*

The Lord has not given me over to death... But even if he does, let all God' people still declare, *his love endures forever.*

Some listening to this may possibly die through the current pandemic. Some of us may lose people we love. The lockdown may send some of us crazy, despairing for an embrace. But we declare: *You are my God, I will praise you... Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever, come what may.*

And we declare, lift high the cross!

The great cross which reminds us - there is no place of pain from which God is absent.

The cross which reminds us that there is no place of isolation or loneliness that God himself does not visit.

The cross which reminds us that the love of God endures forever, even through our doubts, our despair, our sickness, our fears - even through our deaths - the love of God endures forever!

The cross that brings sweetness to the path of suffering, limitless mercy to those caught in selfish and sinful thoughts, solidarity with those who are separated, hope in the very face of death, life eternal where life seems threatened.

With joy, with hope, with praise we lift high the cross of our Saviour!

So let's take up our cross and lift it high as we sing our closing hymn with glad and hopeful hearts.

Hymn recorded by Fran & Seb

*Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.*

1. Come, Christians, follow where our Saviour trod,
our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.
2. Each newborn servant of the Crucified
bears on the brow the seal of him who died.
3. Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
the hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.
4. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally.
5. So shall our song of triumph ever be:
praise to the Crucified for victory!

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
the love of God;
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all
now and always. Amen.

Sung blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you
wherever he may send you;
may he guide you through the wilderness,
protect you through the storm;
may he bring you home rejoicing

at the wonders he has shown you;
may he bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors.