

Cadbury Pastorate, March 28, 2021, 10:30am
Order of Service for Palm Sunday, during Covid-19

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Introduction and call to worship (Ps 118:1,24)

Hymn: Make way, make way

Prayer

Readings: Psalm 118:19-29

 John 12:12-19

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Hymn: Ride on, ride on in majesty!

Blessing

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Introduction and call to worship (Ps 118:1,24)

Good morning and welcome to worship on this Palm Sunday, the day when we remember how Jesus arrived in Jerusalem to a great welcome, and also the start of Holy Week when we know how the mood of the crowd changed leading to Jesus' death on the cross for us all. We will reflect on those events in the coming days, but for now we think of that arrival when the crowd tore down palm branches and waved them to greet their coming King. Then they welcomed him with some words from Psalm 118, and two verses from that Psalm form our call to worship today. So let's still our hearts and minds as we focus on God.

The Psalmist said:

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Hymn: Make way, make way

Prayer

Holy God, we gather to worship You this morning, physically scattered, but one in our love for You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because of Your great love for us we are glad to bring to You our worship in praise and thanksgiving, and to offer You our prayers. May it all be found acceptable to You, a pleasing sacrifice to bring You the glory You and You alone deserve. Mighty God, we praise You for the wonders of Your creation – the vast mountains and the grain of sand, the elephant and the ant, the tall oak and the delicate spring flower. In all that variety, You show us beauty and the level of Your care for us all and all

that You have made. Loving God we thank you that Your love for us is unending and unchangeable, and that You especially showed that love through sending Your Son Jesus into the world, to teach us more of Your love and Your ways, and to make a path open for us to come back to You. We remember with thanksgiving that this cost Jesus His life so that we might live, and then when you called Jesus back to sit at Your side, You sent us Your Holy Spirit to live within us and strengthen us to serve You.

As we set this time apart to worship You, help us to know Your close presence wherever we are. We ask this as we meet in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Readings: Psalm 118:19-29

John 12:12-19

Talk: Were you there?

On Good Friday, one of the things I love to sing is "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" When it is sung slowly, soulfully, as a lament in a rich baritone voice. It's a tune and it's words and it's emotion to be savoured, chewed on, not wolfed down.

Whether in song or in prayerful thought, it's a question I invite you to reflect on towards the end of this week. But it does seem to me that the question really begins right here on Palm Sunday.

Were you there when He rode into the street? Were you there when they welcomed Him with palms? Were you there when they cried out hosanna?

Were you – or if it's easier for you think this way, would you have been there cheering and waving and welcoming your king, sitting on a donkey's colt? Would you have thrown down your cloaks to

smooth the road for Jesus so that the donkey wouldn't trip?
Would you have cried, "Hosanna!"

Hosanna is a bit of a tricky word for us to translate well – in the Hebrew of Psalm 118 it is *hoshia-na*, and it means please save us, deliver us, rescue us now. It is at the same time an exclamation of praise and adoration, and also a prayer. Hosanna is saying: "Yes, Lord, in Your might and majesty, You are the one able to save us, please do just that right now!" There is the joy of celebration that the one able to save is here, the acknowledgement of the need to be saved, and the intercession asking for that deliverance now. That one word conveys all of that meaning: hosanna!

So, I wonder if you would have welcomed Jesus with that shout of hosanna?

Do you know your deep and continuing need of Jesus and do you trust Him and Him alone to be able to answer that cry of your heart?

Psalm 118 is one of the Praise Psalms that pilgrims to Jerusalem would sing as they climbed the hill into the city and headed towards the temple. We believe that it was a Psalm that had overtones of the coming Messiah, welcoming the King who has come to set the people free. It was verses 25 and 26 of that Psalm that John records the crowd singing and shouting as they welcomed Jesus.

No wonder that the Chief Priests and Pharisees were getting nervous! They were already plotting to have Lazarus killed. Because Jesus had raised him back to life after three days in the grave, many people were using that to turn to follow Jesus, and the religious authorities saw power slipping from their grasp.

But they could also read the sign of the times. Because there was such a vast crowd now following Jesus, the Pharisees said to one another: “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!”

After the pain of Covid and in the pain we are still experiencing, we have a huge opportunity to reach out to our neighbours with Good News. We have a Saviour, One who we know is mighty and majestic and able to save us. How will we share that news with those nearby? How can we interest and excite them about Jesus so that they too will join the crowds to welcome Him and proclaim Him King?

Perhaps you need to do some work with God first of all, so that you can make that praise-cry of Hosanna? Perhaps you need to focus on your own relationship with Jesus first, and renew and deepen your love for God so that you will be ready to join the crowd?

Perhaps you’re ready to shout hosanna now, and not care about who might hear and see you acclaiming Jesus as Lord?

Perhaps your role would be as one of the crowd ready to quietly explain to a neighbour what the noise, what the fuss, what the celebration is all about?

Will you be there, when He rides into our streets?

Prayers for ourselves and others

Holy God, we come to You with our concerns and requests for ourselves and for others. This Palm Sunday and Holy Week we pray that You will help us to spend time focussing on You. Renew in us a hunger to know You more deeply and to walk more closely with You. Help us to have boldness to share Your love with others whom we meet, that they too may experience the same love that we know from You.

We continue under lockdown conditions and many of us feel the pain of isolation from human contact, and many are anxious about coming back to meet with others too soon, for fear of the disease. Lord, we thank you for the gifts of wisdom, of diligence, of knowledge and inquisitiveness that have led to such advances in medical knowledge in how to treat and to prevent Covid-19. We give you thanks for the rapid development and deployment of safe and effective vaccines, and we remember those people in poorer countries where access to the vaccine is a long way off. Thank you for charities and NGOs that are working to get treatments and vaccines into places hardest to reach – watch over them and provide them with all they need to treat this global pandemic, we pray.

We pray for Your world, in a week that has seen storms and floods, volcanic eruption, military action and riots on streets we pray for those affected by our changing climate, and those affected by human abuses. Lord, bring peace to Your world, we pray, for the sake of the Prince of Peace.

We pray for those especially in need of healing in body, mind and spirit. Grant them strength and wholeness, we pray. We lift up to You those who grieve, and ask you to bind up broken hearts.

In a moment of quiet and stillness, we bring before You those known to us in need of Your love and comfort.

Thank you, O God, that you care for them even more than we do and know exactly what their needs are. We bring these and all our prayers together as we pray saying the prayer that Jesus taught us...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

As we come towards the end of this time of worship that we have gladly offered, let us continue in prayer as we offer to God our gifts of money.

O Lord, take our time and our talents and our treasure and use it all to transform the world, that many more may know the saving love of Jesus Christ, in whose Name we pray. Amen.

Hymn: Ride on, ride on in majesty!

Blessing

Let us now go from this place to love and serve the Lord in all the ways that pandemic restrictions allow us. And the blessing of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and all whom we love and all whom we should love, this day and for evermore. Amen.