

The Bridgwater Drive Church, Palm Sunday 2022

Call to Worship

Rejoice greatly, O people of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!
Look, your king is coming to you.
He is righteous and victorious,
yet he is humble, riding on a donkey - even on a donkey's colt.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

You are our God, and we will praise You!
O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.
His faithful love endures forever!

Hymn All glory, laud, and honour MP 9

Opening Prayers

On this Palm Sunday, O God, we remember how quickly we change.
How fickle we are, how we pledge our devotion one moment and turn our backs the next.
We go from shouting "Hosanna! Save Us!" to "Crucify Him."
We declare that we love our neighbours and then we turn our backs on
the homeless and hungry in our communities.
We speak up for change and justice in one breath, and then continue unjust practices in our daily
lives by what we consume and the needs we ignore.
Forgive us, O God, for we are half-hearted believers.
Forgive us, O God, for we are partial justice warriors.
Forgive us, O God, for we tire easily and we forget, and we grow weary.
Forgive us, restore us, and renew us for the journey of faith, so that we might become whole people
who live wholly into Your vision of new life. In the name of Christ, who lived into the fullness of
humanity, and whom we follow. **Amen.**

Gentle Christ, you set your face to Jerusalem
the place of trial, of torture and death –
surrounded by noise, by expectation and hope;
love unknown, vulnerability unrecognised.
Gentle Christ, we will walk with you, we will weep with you, we will watch with you;
our eyes on you, our hearts with you, our lives for you;
in humility, in awe, in peace. Amen

Hymn At the Name of Jesus MP 41

Readings: Luke 22:14-30 (lectionary continues to 23:56)
Philippians 2:5-11

We tend to think of Palm Sunday as a joyous festival, Jesus riding triumphantly into Jerusalem, lauded and praised by a large crowd, albeit humbly on a donkey, but this year the lectionary gives us very sombre readings. We should in fact have read all the way through to Luke 23:56 including Gethsemane, the arrest, the courtyard and Peter's denial, Pilate, the crucifixion and burial. This pre-empted all of Holy Week and Maundy Thursday's telling of the Passion and the sadness of Good Friday, though it is perhaps good for churches like ours which won't have another service between now and Easter Sunday. But we have had such a miserable two years with the pandemic, in fact both Easter 2020 and Easter 2021 we were in lockdown with only online services, and now we are in the midst of a war, which while it may not directly affect us, is distressing and adding to the hardships of many people as prices for food, petrol and energy continue to go up and up, so I don't want to focus too much on the sadness and seriousness of this year's lectionary readings, but rather

The Bridgwater Drive Church, Palm Sunday 2022

focus more on the reading from Philippians from which we get the Nicene Creed and today's prayers.

I prepared much of today's service, but not the sermon, before we went away to Colombia. When I re-read the prayers, I was struck by how well they chime with this week's Lent House Group.

Tuesday was the last of the five sessions that have taken place in Rayleigh. The whole series has been about how we are all equal before God, all made in God's image. God is not interested in our human distinctions of race, gender, intellect or social standing. And Jesus came to tear down those distinctions. He did not enter Jerusalem on a mighty horse with a conquering army, he entered on the colt of a donkey, his feet probably scraping the floor. As we heard, when arguments broke out among his disciples about who was the greatest, he said, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them...but not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.' He turned society and its standards on its head. In the House Group material we heard how when Muslims go to the mosque to pray, they are obliged to kneel in the next available space, next to the person who knelt before them. They are not allowed to start a new row, or sit wherever they want, or sit with their friends or people they know. This is an expression of the fact that within the mosque all social distinctions fade away, everyone is to be treated as a friend, a brother or sister. Before God, everyone is equal. And I thought of our churches – how so often people have a favourite pew or seat. Somewhere they have sat all their lives and no one and nothing can persuade them to move from it. How we choose to sit next to friends and usually as far back as possible. How so many churches form cliques and special interest groups that don't allow others in, or do so very reluctantly. This is not what Jesus came for! Jesus did not come to start a member's only club. He did not give his followers a theory or a written manifesto, he shared a meal with them, where he modelled a life of service by washing their feet. He came not to be a king, but to suffer and die in humiliation on the cross. Or, as we read in Philippians, 'though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself and taking the form of a slave was born in human likeness' and humbled himself to the point of death on a cross.

What we have in today's readings is the darker side of Palm Sunday. The more real version. The one that ends with a body in a tomb. There is no mention of palms at all, no shouts of joy and hallelujahs. I remember when I was in my final year of training, in a placement church in London, I mentioned to my supervisor that I planned to talk about this kind of sadder Palm Sunday, and he said, but palm Sunday is dark and sinister – Jesus comes in on a donkey, like a clown, like the court jesters, and clowns are always a bit sinister. He recommended I watch a Charlie Chaplin film called the Pilgrim in which Charlie is an escaped convict who disguises himself as a priest and just happens to turn up at a town where everyone is waiting for the new priest to arrive (the real priest is unavoidably delayed for a week) and so Charlie, the criminal, is accepted as the priest. And he gets away with it, and even goes to stay with a widow and her daughter, and to cut a long story short he changes his life around and becomes a better person, so much so that he recovers something

The Bridgwater Drive Church, Palm Sunday 2022

stolen from the family by another criminal. However, eventually the family see a wanted poster and the sheriff says he must take him back to jail, but on the way he lets Charlie go. He gives him his freedom and the subtitle reads 'a new life, peace at last'. There are many parallels with the Palm Sunday story – Jesus turns up in Jerusalem where people are waiting for a Messiah, but Jesus is not the Messiah they are looking for. Jesus changes lives and gives us new life. Jesus is not masquerading when he enters Jerusalem, he's not in disguise, he has been truthful from the start about what is going to happen to him, but the people, his own disciples included, mistake him for what he is not – an all-conquering king riding in triumph to take down the Roman empire.

One of the prayers I read for today said we can easily get people to find branches to lay down, or easily order Palm crosses, but what if Jesus actually arrived, inviting us to really lay down something important to us, what would we do? Would we even give up our favourite seat in the church? Would we sit next to someone didn't know, and really welcome them? If they were poor and unwashed, smelly, maybe a different colour to us, would we really see them as our equal?

The House Group session for this week had the title What is a Christian? It talked about how we are taught to lay aside differences, for in God there is no male or female, no Jew or Greek, no slave or free person.' A Christian is one who follows the way of Jesus, who serves others, who treats all as equal in the eyes of God. Amen

I thought that rather than parade round the church as people often do, waving branches and singing hallelujahs we would walk on a path closer to home to collect our Palm crosses. A rain and windswept path, a path with rubbish, with debris from the storms that are increasing due to our neglect and abuse of God's creation, a path with obstacles and problems, just like our lives. So, we will reflect on the pictures on the floor, while we listen to **Crucified Man by Graham Kendrick**

<https://youtu.be/1k0ak1xn5uM> (words at the end)

Hymn My song is love unknown MP 478 omit v 5 & 6

Lord's Supper

We do not often say any of the Creeds in the URC, but the Nicene Creed was developed from the ancient hymn we read in Philippians 2:5-11, and so today we will read it (R&S 760)

Rather than the usual words, today we use the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper that we heard in Luke's Gospel – **Luke 22:14-20, 28-30a**

Share Bread & Wine

Luke 22:39-42 and so we pray:

Prayers

Gracious and loving God, In the journey of life, you are our guide and our companion.

From our beginning to our end, you are there.

You run this race alongside us, at times encouraging us, at times comforting us, at times tending to our wounds, at times carrying us when we don't think we can take another step.

The Bridgwater Drive Church, Palm Sunday 2022

For six weeks we have been on a Lenten journey,
and you have been right here with us - in our discipline and devotion,
in our weakness and failure, in our fear, and in our hope.
As we spend this final week with Jesus in Jerusalem,
we are amazed once again by his gentle spirit and fierce determination.
As he confronts those who challenge him,
he confronts our own stubbornness and defiant wills.
As he cares even for those who hate him,
we are challenged to love as he loves.
As he bears witness to the emergence of your kingdom,
our eyes are opened to your presence all around us.
As he moves with resolve toward his dark destiny,
we find ourselves struggling to understand why it has to be this way.
God, the journey is not just about the destination;
it is about each step along the way.
The journey itself is a blessing, with all of its joys and sorrows.
As we run this race you are shaping us into new people.
As we move with you, we are continually born anew.
Help us to be attentive to each step, in the darkness and in the light.
Help us to fully experience all that we encounter,
the good and the bad, for in it all we discover you.

O Christ, you entered the city as a simple poor man
yet still you caused uproar, and questions;
you drew the expectations of a hungry crowd and brought buried conflicts to the light.
May we, who like Pilate are sometimes swayed by the crowd's approval,
and who often avoid conflict for fear of its cost to us,
hold fast to the gospel of peace and justice
and follow faithfully in your way of compassion and solidarity
with those who are poor and excluded, wherever it may lead us. Amen

We pray for the needs of the world, for our community and for ourselves:
We continue to pray for the people of Ukraine and for peace in that land. By your grace, may there
come justice for the atrocities committed and reconciliation among the peoples caught up in the
dealings of the rich and powerful.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
We pray for our country – for all those suffering due to the rise in the cost of living, for all those who
have to choose between heating or eating.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
We pray for our families and friends, those with and without our church fellowship, for those we
know of who are ill, in hospital, dying, and for those who mourn.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
As we enter Holy Week, we pray that we may renew our faith, that we may truly live as resurrection
people, trusting in your hope and the promise of life eternal.
Jesus said, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done.'
So let it be with us, that we may discern the will of God and do it, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn Ride on, ride on in majesty MP 580

Blessing:

The Bridgwater Drive Church, Palm Sunday 2022

And now we lay down our palm branches.
And with them we lay down our belief that there is another way for you to be God.
As the last echo of the final alleluia fades,
so does our hope that this journey can end any other way.
Holy Week stretches ahead glory-less and pain-full
Whether we walk with much faith or little, we look towards the cross,
knowing it is both the most human and most divine of all journeys
So, travel the road with courage, with love,
and with the uneasy peace that is the gift of faith into this holiest of weeks. Amen

The Bridgwater Drive Church sung Blessing.

Hymns used under The Bridgwater Drive Church CCLI licence 257182

Words to Crucified Man:

I have placed all my hope in a crucified man
In the wounds in his side, his feet and his hands
I have traded my pride for a share in his shame
And the glory that one-day will burst from his pain

I've abandoned my trust in the wise and the proud
For this fragile, mysterious weakness of God
And I dare to believe in his scandalous claim
That his blood cleanses sin for who ever
Will call on his name
Live or die here I stand
I've placed my hope in a crucified man

I believe as they beat on his beautiful face
He turned a torturer's chair to an altar of grace
Where the worst we can do met the best that God does
Where unspeakable hate met the gaze
Of unstoppable love
At the crux of it all there he hangs
I've placed my hope in a crucified....

Man of sorrows man of grief
Will he stay beyond belief?

When the purest and best took the force of our curse
Death's victory armada juddered into reverse...
And either we bow or we stumble and fall
For the wisdom of a suffering God
Has made fools of us all
I gladly admit that I am
But I've placed my hope in a crucified ...

Man of sorrows man of grief
Will he stay beyond belief?

I have buried my life in the cold earth with him
Like a seed in the winter, I wait for the spring
From that garden of tombs Eden rises again
And Paradise blooms from his body
And never will end
He'll finish all he began
Creation hopes in a crucified man

When I stand at the judgement
I have no other plan
I've placed my hope in a crucified man

Like the thief nailed beside him
I have no other plan
I've placed my hope in a crucified man