

Sunday Sermon Notes – Palm Sunday 5th April 2020

From Rev'd Jilleen Chambers

Today is Palm Sunday.

How do we continue to sing the Lord's songs in this strange new land of COVID-19?

In normal times (seems like an age ago but only a couple of weeks), we would have made preparations for Palm Sunday – at the last session of the Ecumenical Lenten Bible study on Friday, participants would have laughingly and lovingly made small palm crosses out of date palm leaves; enough for the Catholic and Anglican congregations. Trimmed them and placed them in a container in the fridge to be handed out on Palm Sunday.

Today we would have gathered to tell the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Of the crowds who welcomed him as he rode on a donkey down the road from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. They waved palm branches and placed their cloaks on the road as he travelled. They hailed him as a coming king. We would have had a procession into the church waving palm branches and holding our palm crosses that had been blessed and distributed – singing:

All glory, praise and honour
to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.

In preparation, the churches would have been decorated with palm branches and the red vestments ready. The elements of the Eucharist, bread, wine and water prepared and waiting for us to come into the sacred space. The space where we would have sung hymns of praise and thanksgiving: I will sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me; of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem – Ride on, ride on in majesty; My song is love unknown; and Brother, sister, let me serve you.

The space where we would have again told the shocking story of the coming holy week – of Jesus betrayal, trial and crucifixion.

And as we listened, we would have wondered afresh, how could Jesus allow this to happen? Surely the one who stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee, healed the sick and crippled, fed the five thousand, and raised Lazarus from the dead could have walked free? Surely the one who was God incarnate could have called on the power of the Holy Spirit and legions of angels to overthrow the authorities and the power of Rome? Surely, he could have broken free from the shame of the cross? And even more shocking, how could have God the Father have allowed this to happen to his Son? But no, he hung there and died –

We would have heard again Jesus' command to love one another as he has loved us. We would have prepared our hearts for the wonder of Maundy Thursday when Jesus washed the disciples' feet and shared the Last Supper with them –

He broke bread and said to them:

'Take', eat, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

At the end of the meal he shared the cup with them:

'Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

The only answer to all our questions is: LOVE.

The wonder and absolute enormity of the Triune God's, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, love for us! It is a love that leaves us in wonder and absolute awe. That Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died to restore us to fellowship with the Father; to redeem us from our sin and brokenness; to cleanse us from all our sin and present us spotless to the Father. Through his obedience the power of sin over us is broken; he died the death that we cannot die. We are free!

This week, we are invited to sit in the wonder of that love that knows no bounds. The love that invites us, no matter who we are, what we have done, where we are, and whatever our past or situation in life, to turn again to Jesus as the one who in love reaches out to save us, restore us and hold us in his wondrous hands of love. The hands that are forever scarred with the nails of the cross: the scars that forever bear testimony to the love of God for a hurting world.

A world that lives with the fear of a virus that has wreaked havoc in the lives of so many; a world in lock-down; a world that cries and mourns for the many suffering and dying from COVID-19.

We are reminded that Jesus wept for his friend as he weeps with us today.

A Prayer for Palm Sunday:

Loving God,

We praise you today as we remember and celebrate Palm Sunday.

Be with us as we begin our journey through Holy Week;

And be our guide and encourager that we may more closely align our lives with yours.

Today we are reminded not only of your willingness to suffer and die,

but also of our own mortality during this time of fears, loss and isolation.

Yet we trust and hope through the knowledge of your love for us and your promise of eternal life;

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Blessing:

May the Lord be with you, hold you and keep you, and give you courage and strength for this time.

May the peace of Christ enfold you and draw you to himself.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father our Creator, the Son our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Guide and our Comforter be with you and all whom you love, now and always. Amen.

Take care and the Lord be with you.

Rev'd Jilleen