



# Weekly worship resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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## Today's reading

### Mark 11: 1-11 ("Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem")

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."' "

They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna!

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

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. Amen. (NRSV)

## Today's hymns

Palm Sunday (as we will see in this week's sermon) is filled with excellent hymns like these:

*Hosanna, loud hosanna, the little children sang* (CH4: 367)

*Come into the streets with me! Come to where the crowds will be* (CH4: 366)

*Ride on, ride on, the time is right: the roadside crowds scream with delight* (CH4: 370)

*My song is love unknown, my Saviour's love to me* (CH4: 399)

*All glory, laud and honour, to you, Redeemer, King* (CH4: 364)

## *In the Name of the Father and of*

Everybody is familiar with the story of the Trojan horse and how it was deployed by cunning Greek military leaders to overwhelm their enemies in the city of Troy. The daring assault came after a siege which had been maintained without success for a whole decade. So what was to be done?

Build a giant horse, they thought, and fill it up with a squad of elite troops. Then place the horse beyond the city's gates as though a parting gift left there to be accepted. And so it was done, with the Greeks pretending to sail off into the distance.

Out went the jubilant Trojans to claim their trophy. The huge horse was dragged into Troy and set to one side for closer scrutiny the following day.

After dark the huge model was opened from the inside by the soldiers who heaved wide the gates, so allowing the Greek army, quietly lurking outside, to flood in and capture the city.

Palm Sunday is something of a Trojan horse. When we stop to look at it, it appears to be a very attractive gift to the Church. This seems every inch to be a day of celebration with lively hymns, loud hosannas and – at long last! – some proper recognition of who Jesus is. Look at him entering the Holy City of Jerusalem being lauded as “Son of David” by the adoring crowds. The Galilean has finally made it home to the centre of the Jewish faith.

Only ... that's not what we're seeing at all. Galilee is a long way from Jerusalem. And Jesus is far from home, cut off from any kind of comfort zone. As for the crowds, we know only too well what they will do come the end of the week.

Pause for a moment to reflect on these sobering words from John Bell and Graham Maule (CH370, vv.3 and 4):

*Ride on, ride on, while well aware that those who shout and wave and stare  
are mortals who, with common breath, can crave for life and lust for death.*

*Ride on, ride on, though blind with tears, though dumb to speak and deaf to jeers.  
Your path is clear, though few can tell their garments pave the road to hell.*

It has taken us from January to April to get from the start of Mark chapter 1 to the start of Mark chapter 11. And it has taken Jesus a long, long time to reach this point. The author has taken up 58 percent of all his pages placing Jesus in Jerusalem. Now the remaining 42 percent (chapters 11 to 16) will span just under seven short days. Check my arithmetic on your own little Mark's gospel and (hopefully!) you'll see what I mean.

This week we call holy is central to Mark's message, because he sees the Crucifixion as such a world-changing event. That may be why he gathers his stories with such care, pointing us onwards from Jesus' arrival on a colt (no donkey here!) to Jesus' departure on foot, a cross of wood against his bleeding back.

Palm Sunday is no celebration: only an arresting prelude to the main action ahead.

What then of the crowd? Why does Mark place them both here on Sunday and then at Pilate's palace, first thing on Friday morning? I wonder if this is the writer's way of showing his readers a big home truth about human nature. It's not just the bad guys who fail Jesus in the last week of his life: the Judases, the Peters, the High Priest and his Council, the Prefect of Rome and his soldiers. It's also the ordinary folk, so keen to welcome their guest on Sunday and yet it seems equally determined to have him nailed to a cross five days later.

## *the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .*

These are ordinary folk, just like us. We come to this day singing (or maybe this year, humming) the Palm Sunday hymns with gusto, as though we are part of “The Jesus Supporters’ Club”. But look how we let him down so often, and in so many different ways.

Maybe our reading points us to human frailty, as shown in an article I read a while back by someone who had witnessed a Palm Sunday all-age talk in church. Palm fronds (a symbol of Jesus’ kingly welcome) were handed out to the tiny tots. How nice. Only, as any parent will tell you, palm fronds in the hands of children can become tools of grim imagination, as first they are held (“this is unusual”) and then shaken (“what a great noise”) and finally used for whacking wee friends over the head (“I never thought church could be so much fun!”).

The article went on to suggest that all this might have been avoided if the fronds had first been crafted into thought-provoking palm crosses. Nice idea, though I’m not at all sure of this well-meaning tactic. Take a cross, turn it upside down and what does a child find in their hand? The perfect sword, ready for prodding neighbours in an aggressive and annoying way.

It seems, no matter what we do, we are almost magnetically drawn to the pleasure of power games: children and adults alike. One side of us embraces so many good qualities like care, acceptance, diversity, inclusion, while our other more selfish and destructive side lies hidden just beneath the surface, too close for any kind of comfort or complacency.

Once again, take a moment or two to consider a much-loved Holy Week hymn from 17<sup>th</sup> century writer Samuel Crossman (CH399, v.3):

*Sometimes they strew his way, and his sweet praises sing;  
resounding all the day hosannas to their King.*

*Then ‘Crucify!’ is all their breath, and for his death they thirst and cry.*

What are we to sing today? A hand-wringing chorus of, “Woe is me, for I am a sinner”? We can – an should – openly acknowledge before our Maker that we are a complex mix of devotion and disdain, just like the crowd in Jerusalem on Sunday and Friday. That would be a good admission, as we lay before God the failings of life and of faith which are ours.

More than this, though, we should be bold, taking Mark seriously when he paints Holy Week in the gentle, pastel shades of Grace. To our eyes the story of Christ’s Passion may look stark in its greyness, highlighted in terrible splashes of red. But there is plenty in Jesus’ words and actions to show us where God truly is in all the human awfulness being depicted.

As writer Tony Robinson so helpfully says: “God’s mercy and forgiveness are poured out for us, poured out all over us. When the hosannas of Palm Sunday have faded, praise for the deep love and mercy of God to us is the song that keeps on singing.”

Or, if we return to the 17<sup>th</sup> century once more and let the beautiful words of Samuel Crossman focus our hearts and minds on the sacrifice that is to come (CH399, vv.6 and 7):

*In life, no house, no home my Lord on earth might have;  
in death, no friendly tomb but what a stranger gave.*

*What may I say? Heaven was his home: but mine the tomb wherein he lay.*

*Here might I stay and sing: no story so divine;  
never was love, dear King, never was grief like thine!*

*This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend. Amen.*

# Praying for others

Gracious God, you come to save people in their hour of deepest need.

We come to you this day,  
acutely aware of the challenging times in which we find ourselves.

Whenever we switch on the news we see with great clarity  
the suffering of so many individuals, the grief of so many families.

We pray for *[names here]*, asking your blessing upon each one  
as they yearn for your Light in the darkness of the shadows.

Whether here in East Lothian,  
in the villages, towns and cities of Scotland,  
across the nations of the United Kingdom,  
or all around the globe,  
may that divine Light be our guide.

And may all who fight anxiety, or fear, or illness, or exhaustion  
find their strength in your Strength.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## And finally ...

*Abigail Morrison considers the big difference between social and physical isolation:*

Almost two weeks of social distancing down. Life with a distance of less than two metres between us all seems like a lot longer ago than that. But I have just finished a call where Robin said we are really being asked to practice physical distancing, not really social distancing. Now, Robin is not suggesting for a second that we should be ignoring government advice. But he makes a good point.

One of the wonders of modern technology is that you can still enjoy face-to-face chats with friends and family from distances of well over two metres away. Last night I enjoyed my second weekly gin and tonic with friends in Glasgow. I have spent a couple of hours with close girlfriends nattering over a coffee – one in Glasgow, one in Bishopston and me in Longniddry. And I regularly chat to my children in London and Rugby.

Even for those without a computer of any sort you can still talk: I chat to my mother on the phone. So we need not be socially isolated. Of course we all sorely miss the ability to give our friends and family a hug. But we are not alone.

In fact, one of the positive outcomes of all this physical distance is that many of us are actually contacting our friends and family more than we used to. We are thinking more of others who are stuck alone indoors, and are trying much harder to reach out to them. Perhaps it's because we have more time to do this. Perhaps it's because we are aware of missing social interaction ourselves. Whatever the cause it's a real boon. Our challenge will be to make sure we continue to do this when the world eventually returns to normal.