



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 54

Sunday 28th March 2021

Today's reading

Psalm 31:11–24 (“Prayer and praise for deliverance”)

I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbours,
an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.
I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.
For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.

But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’

My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Do not let me be put to shame, O Lord, for I call on you;

let the wicked be put to shame; let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.

Let the lying lips be stilled that speak insolently against the righteous with pride and contempt.

O how abundant is your goodness that you have laid up for those who fear you,
and accomplished for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of everyone!

In the shelter of your presence you hide them from human plots;

you hold them safe under your shelter from contentious tongues.

Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was beset
as a city under siege.

I had said in my alarm, ‘I am driven far from your sight.’

But you heard my supplications when I cried out to you for help.

Love the Lord, all you his saints.

The Lord preserves the faithful, but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.

Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

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| 1 | <i>Hosanna, loud hosanna</i> (CH:367) | 2 | <i>O God, you are my God alone</i> (CH:43) |
| 3 | <i>All glory, laud, and honour</i> (CH:364) | 4 | <i>Lord of all hopefulness</i> (CH:166) |
| | 5 | <i>Ride on! Ride on in majesty</i> (CH:365) | |

In the Name of the Father and of

Who doesn't like Palm Sunday, with its triumphal entry, its big old hymns and those branches waving freely? It is, by any measure, a most singular day in the Church calendar, soaked in expectation and dripping in drama. For us there's tension. There's our foreknowledge of what is to come in the days of Holy Week. And, of course, there's that donkey, which always helps to make any story an engaging story.

But did you know that, as well as being Palm Sunday, today is also known as "Passion Sunday", when we take the long view of the seven days which lie ahead of us? Beyond his encounter with the adoring crowds in Jerusalem, Jesus has to deal first with confrontation, then betrayal, denial, abandonment, trial, torture and execution. The party atmosphere of Christ's arrival into the Holy City will soon evaporate like dew off a blade of springtime grass. And once the excitement is gone, we will be left only with heartache.

As we saw last week, the writer of Psalm 31 knows all about heartache. Seeking refuge in God, he wants to find safety from the threat of all his struggles and sadnesses. Returning today to the second part of that same song of praise, we find the yearnings of the writer again laid bare for us to see and to understand:

I have become like a broken vessel.

For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

Here then we witness a psalmist who isn't just cracking. He's broken – shattered into so many pieces; unable to put himself back together. As we read on, we get a sense of what's happening in the life of that downcast individual. He is filled with deepest fear at what he is hearing around him: plans are afoot to gang up on him and have him put to death.

If you and I were in the shoes of the psalmist, we too might very well think of ourselves as broken vessels, unfit to meet the challenges and the *terror* about to come our way. And actually, the word "terror" is not out of place here, in view of the whispering and plotting going on. If we think of "terror" as an "*overmastering fear*", we start to get a sense of what is at stake. The writer knows that he is in terrible jeopardy, incapable of addressing the level of threat that he senses all around. He is struck down to the very core of his being.

But this is only half the story of Psalm 31. Recall from last week how we also noted something very positive in this song. The psalmist, turning to God for refuge, finds a safe haven – a home – in the security of the Almighty. And this week we see the same message flowing once more from the words of Psalm 31:

But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'

My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Yes, this may be a cry for help, but in no way is it a *desperate* cry for help, because in God the psalmist finds his true hope even in the most unenviable of situations.

Can you think of a person known to you whose strength of faith helped them in times of deepest trial? Maybe a name or a face immediately springs to mind. Perhaps it is someone in your family or in church who had to go through a trial of the most demanding kind, whether in terms of health, or work, or family. They knew they didn't have the strength themselves but they turned to God and found the resources that they needed so very badly. To know someone like that is a powerful thing indeed.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

In Jesus, we know someone like that.

Here, at the start of Holy Week, we look at the man on the donkey, and we too might feel tempted to yell “Hosanna” in praise and joy. For the crowd at that gate into Jerusalem, their hosannas were probably misplaced, as they may very well have identified Jesus as their boy who would, at last, overturn Roman rule in the kingdom of Judea. The folk in the crowd looked, and they saw, but *what* they saw in Jesus was a rebel with a violent agenda, when in fact he was the Prince of Peace, ushering in a quite different type of revolution.

Revolution? Well, yes. The Christ of Palm Sunday is no “gentle Jesus”. He has ridden into town with confrontation and scandal firmly on his mind. Ahead of him is the overturning of the money-changers’ tables, right there in the Temple. That action will bring consequences, as Jesus knows only too well. And so we see Jesus choosing to make a name for himself. Tongues will click. Chins will wag. There will be the furrowing of eyebrows and the shaking of heads as the leaders of the faith ask: “Just who does he think he is?”

We who know the story, are privileged to know the answer. Jesus is the one who goes in, eyes open, to take on Jerusalem’s establishment, in full and certain knowledge of what is about to unfold through the second half of Holy Week:

... I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

Not so long ago, a minister friend of mine posed me a rather intriguing theological question. “Did Jesus come to die,” he asked, “or did Jesus come to live?”

Without a moment’s hesitation, I responded: “Jesus came to live.”

“I agree,” he said. “And the consequence of his *living* led others to bring about his death.”

The Church could argue long and hard about this. For what it’s worth here is how I see it: the story of Holy Week should be looked at through the shadows of human sin, as we find the bringer of God’s Light challenging those people who were so determined to stay in the dark, keeping hold of their power and their position. A cruel Roman Empire, aided by their supporters in the Temple brought about Good Friday. To all appearances, sin wins as God’s Son is given over to death.

In Holy Week, Jesus stands up for what is right, only to find corruption taking its natural – and entirely predictable – course. We see it so often when darkness tries to stifle and extinguish the light. But through all the suffering of the next five days, we will see something world-changing in the actions this strange man on a donkey. Look at him and see for yourself the Passion (with a capital “P”) of one who, though able to walk away, elects to make himself vulnerable, and so ultimately succeeds in changing the world – *our* world.

*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, God’s love demands;
justice and peace lie in your hands.*

*Evil and angel voices rhyme:
this is the man and this the time.*

Amen.

Praying for others

Lord God, our times are in your hands.

In the autumn, with its winds and gathering clouds,
may we be bringers of sunlight and golden fruit to all who are suffering
mental and emotional affliction through oppression, injustice and addiction.

In the winter chills and lifeless days, full of sobs and sighing,
may we be bringers of warmth and comfort to those in physical need:
the hungry, the helpless, offering our practical help and kindness.

In the springtime with all its hope and expectation,
may we bring refreshing rains and bursting sunbeams to our neighbours
in love and joy, peace, patience and kindness.

Until summer comes at last, bright and golden,
help us love you, our faithful, loving, gracious God,
with all our hearts, all our minds and all our souls.

Father, we turn to you for strength and courage.

Through Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

And finally . . .

Robin Hill considers a busy week ahead:

I am often told by parishioners that Christmas (and here I quote for the benefit of the uninitiated), “will be your busy time of year”. In fact, for sheer engagement with the Christian faith, the busiest time of year by far is always Holy Week: those seven days which take us from Palm Sunday through to Easter Eve. Add on to the end of that schedule the celebration of Easter Day itself and you come to know the real meaning of a “busy time”.

That said, I love Holy Week’s roller coaster of events, emotions and deep thoughtfulness. For 2021, things are a little different. Here is what we have in store for the days to come:

Lent Film Study of “The Theory of Everything”: Friday 26th March, then Monday 29th March to Thursday 1st April, 2pm via Zoom (contact Abigail for details);

Palm Sunday internet service: 9.45am via Zoom and YouTube;

Palm Sunday service: 11am, Longniddry Church (book via Sheena: 07718 612 546);

Maundy Thursday Evening Communion: 7pm via Zoom and YouTube;

Good Friday morning service: 11am via Zoom and YouTube;

Easter Day outdoor Communion: 8am, Longniddry Church (please note: book via Sheena, and bring your own bread and wine);

Easter Day internet service: 9.45am via Zoom and YouTube;

Easter Day service: 11am, Gladsmuir Church (book via Peter: 07443 858 983);

Easter Day “Emmaus Light” service: 6.30pm via Zoom and YouTube.

Please know that you are welcome to any or all of our services in the days to come, as we travel the way of Jesus through Holy Week and on to Easter.