

## **SERMON – Palm Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

Today is a day where we take on board absolutely everything about the Lord's Passion and the mystery of His Passion.

It's all so concentrated that if we'd just bought it from the shops it would say on the side of the bottle "dilute to taste."

Palm Sunday is a celebration of Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem with the Palm Gospel which we heard at St Mary's before we left, and soon followed here by the whole of the Passion narrative.

You may wonder why we do that to ourselves on Palm Sunday? Well I imagine it is because many people will go home from Palm Sunday and the next time they will come to church will be Easter Sunday when we celebrate the wonder and joy of the risen Lord.

A lot happens between Jesus heading to Jerusalem on a donkey and being hailed as the expected Messiah and the day of Resurrection a week later.

Far too much to talk about in a 10 minute sermon. And far too much to be condensed into one service of worship.

For the drama of the trial, the mocking and the execution of Jesus and the miraculous events that followed are the essence of Christian truth and can hardly be skipped over.

And we owe it to ourselves not to take this lightly or to try and jump to the happy bit.

For it is the spiritual truth behind these most important aspects of Jesus's journey, that sets Christianity apart from all other religions.

And Palm Sunday is the beginning of our engagement with the true meaning of what our Christian faith is.

This mystery will challenge us, both intellectually and emotionally.

And yet the events that take us to the shocking tableau of the crucifixion and the surprising scenes of empty tomb and resurrection are keys to divine revelation and make the Christian Gospel message so extraordinarily magnificent and overwhelming and divine.

God completely transforms history.  
This is not a religious belief but an unequivocal divine act.

We are at the opposite end of the spectrum of Christmas here.

There are no cosy family scenes of a baby in a box of hay. No Visiting gift bearers.

What we have are the most sacred mysteries of God played out on a human stage.

And ordinary people like you and me are invited to participate in that mystery.

The privilege of that is breathtaking.

It is the bit that some Christian leaders try to skip over for fear of disturbing anybody. You know the kind of comment. We need to be careful because it might put some people off.

A bit like the Last Supper and Jesus's command to eat bread and wine in a special way so that we eat his body and blood.

Too weird for the modern mind so let's pretend it is not part of the Christian Mystery and just say Jesus was a nice guy who told us to love each other.

How wrong we are to do this. For these are ways in which God speaks to us in a poetic and profound way.

As Christians this is not a time of year for trying to make our Gospel safe.

We need to let it speak for itself.

To enter into it is to experience it.

And that's why I would encourage you all to join us for our Thursday, Friday and Saturday services as well as our resurrection day on Sunday.

Easter is not an easy journey but it is a transformative one for our souls. And it is the only way to make our Pentecost really live for us 50 days later.

We should not be afraid to promote the sacredness of entering into something we don't understand in a prayerful and devotional way.

Recognising that to try and explain it with limited understanding and arrogant opinioning is to ruin it for oneself.

It doesn't ruin the mystery itself. It just means that we bar ourselves from being able to enter into it by our naïve and ignorant thinking.

Easter is full of God's mysteries and God's mysteries are all about love and sacrifice.

We forget that when God birthed creation into existence he sacrificed something of himself in order for manifestation to come into being.

So let's respect and give space for the Easter Mystery.  
Not jumping ahead to the Supper of Thursday or the trial and cross of Friday or the empty tomb and reappearance of Saturday and Sunday.

Let's take it a step at a time. For today, Jesus enters Jerusalem.

And the Jews were right to hail Jesus as the Messiah on that Palm Sunday. For he was coming to save and empower all of us. But not by becoming an earthly benevolent ruler but by making all things new.

Jesus was getting an increasing amount of attention now and his power was rising to the surface.

He could so easily have taken on the role of earthly saviour if he had not been so focussed upon his true mission.

In the Gospel of the Palms we see an unprecedented sight.  
Jesus rides through the gates of the city on a donkey followed by his faithful believers.

And suddenly his entry causes a frenzy in the souls of the people. The crowd get gripped by a hysteria.

It must have been a great roar of ecstatic delight that went up from the crowd.

The palm has always been seen as the tree-symbol of the sun with its spreading palms like the rays of the sun.

The crowd rushed forward to spread his path with the symbol of the sun.

Is this finally when the people recognise Jesus for who he is.  
The Christ. God with us and all that that stands for?

Sadly we know this is not the case. For this act of entering Jerusalem is the beginning of the most solemn week in human history.

The same people who strew palms before him with loud cries of Hosanna would later shriek with a fanatical hatred a few days later. Calling for Pilate to crucify him.

Jesus knew all of this.

The hysteria of the mob may have been the kind of thing that we are now used to with pop stars and movie celebrities.

But Jesus was not in a mood to enjoy adulation.

He had more serious things on his mind.

The Christ goes calmly through the waves of enthusiasm and acclamation.

He makes the entry on deeper levels.

Palm Sunday with its palm leaves of the sun celebrates something of the old sun worship.

But the physical sun goes down at the end of the day and dies in the west.

Easter Sunday at the end of Holy Week will celebrate the day of the new sun, the spiritual sun.

This spiritual sun does not set.

It is steadfast and enduring.

Christ WILL conquer death.

He enters the Old Jerusalem on Palm Sunday but he carries the New Jerusalem into the setting, dying world to transform it forever.

The crowd mentality is a disturbing and fickle one.

But Jesus understood his journey and he knew the importance of every step of it.

For this is no ordinary hero we see before us sat on a lowly donkey as he did once before in his mother's womb over thirty years previously.

This is no earthly king.

His kingliness is of a completely different order.

This is no freedom fighter.

Though the freedom he brings, does take us beyond our wildest dreams of freedom into the heart of God's presence.

This is no ancient sun god or sun hero.

It is the light of the world showing us how we too can become children of light.

Children of a new, inner spring.

And our inner spring of the Easter festival can be achieved by the path of pilgrimage which passes along the stations of Holy Week.

This week, the Week of Weeks, or Holy Week, is the climax and focus of the gospels.

With Palm Sunday we make our beginning.

As the week progresses the events of Christ's passion unfold within our hearts but we have to engage with the journey. We have to walk with Christ and be there on that road to the cross and beyond.

It isn't enough just to think these events in our heads. Our hearts and our bodies need to feel it too.

So may this blessed Holy Week surprise you with the living presence and companionship of the Prince of Peace and may you be struck by the realisation that God is even more awesome than you could possibly have imagined.

Amen