

Tarves Parish Church - Palm Sunday 5 April



God's steadfast love endures forever!

You might like to read the following hymn slowly. Think carefully about the meaning of the words as you do so.

CH4 367

1. *Hosanna, loud Hosanna
The little children sang
Through city street and temple
Their joyful welcome rang
They shouted out their praises
To Christ, the children's friend
Who welcomes all with blessing
Whose love will never end.*
2. *From Olivet they followed,
A large exultant crowd
The victor palm branch waving,
And chanting clear and loud;
Bright angels join the chorus,
Beyond the cloudless sky,
"Hosanna in the highest!
Glory to God on high!"*

3. *"Hosanna in the highest!"
That ancient song we sing,
For Christ is our redeemer,
The Lord of heaven our King.
Oh may we ever praise him
With heart and life and voice,
And in his living presence
Eternally rejoice.*

The language of that hymn describes a celebratory procession entering the city of Jerusalem, making its way towards the Temple. It paints a very different picture to our quietened cities and our deserted streets. No pilgrimage from Tarves to Barthol Chapel this year. And yet as we approach Easter, the most significant festival of the Christian year, today's psalm reminds us that God's steadfast love is not for a moment or even a life-time, or even a generation, but forever.

Bible Reading – Psalm 118:1-2, 5-14

- ¹ *O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures for ever!*
- ² *Let Israel say,
'His steadfast love endures for ever.'*
- ...
- ⁵ *Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.*
- ⁶ *With the LORD on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?*
- ⁷ *The LORD is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.*
- ⁸ *It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in mortals.*
- ⁹ *It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in princes.*
- ¹⁰ *All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
- ¹¹ *They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
- ¹² *They surrounded me like bees;
they blazed like a fire of thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
- ¹³ *I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the LORD helped me.*
- ¹⁴ *The LORD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.*

Comment

Psalm 118 is the psalm suggested by the Church for Palm Sunday. However I've chosen to include in our reading different verses. These verses describe the Psalmist's battle against powerful enemies, enemies who threaten to overwhelm him, swarming around him like killer bees or blazing like a wild fire. In the face of these enemies, at a time when his strength is at its lowest ebb and he is about to collapse, the psalmist discovers that all is not lost. God is his strength and salvation. The psalm continues with the more familiar celebration of God's life-giving victory in which the psalmist and all the people are invited to share.

The psalmist discovered that it is not enough to place our trust in other human beings, however powerful they may seem to be. And perhaps there is a message here for us as criticism of government grows and people place a huge burden of expectation on our NHS staff. Many heroes are emerging during these difficult days. Yet time and again we look, not simply for human heroes, but for human saviours.

Is this not what the crowds were looking for as they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday – a great human leader who will rescue them from the Romans and bring them freedom? Below is the account of that event as we find it in Matthew's Gospel.

Bible Reading – St Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

*'Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

*'Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'*

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Reflection

On that first Palm Sunday, the crowd welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as a hero. Here was the strong and powerful leader that God had promised, the one who would save them from their enemies. But things don't go in the direction in which the people hope. There is no armed uprising against the occupying Roman forces. Jesus refuses to indulge in shows of power and strength. The people want someone they can follow blindly, and then no doubt blame when things go wrong. But Jesus insists that they cannot abrogate responsibility for their own share of the mess and muddle that they are in.

When we read on in Matthew's Gospel we find that through story and action Jesus sets out the priorities of God's kingdom. He insists on giving the last and the least, the hungry, the thirsty, the poor and the stranger their proper place. He teaches people about God's values, values that speak of faith and hope and love beyond our imagining. And he challenges them to think about what it means to live and die by these values. This is not what the people are expecting. And four days later the crowd who shouted Hosanna are shouting "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Today there is no doubt that in the coronavirus we face a formidable enemy, an enemy that is rampaging through our world like a swarm of bees whose hive has been destroyed, or a wild fire driven by the wind. It has taken occupation of our minds and thoughts. It has robbed us of our freedom to go about our daily lives. And we look for deliverance. But to whom do we look?

Yes we need leaders in government, planning a response to this virus. And yes we also need health care and other essential workers to look after us when we get ill and keep us supplied with food. All who perform these jobs are giving sacrificially of themselves. They are heroes and we applaud them for it – but as I have said already, they are also fallible – because they are human beings like us. Ultimately our salvation is not their responsibility and we should not burden them with it.

In contrast to this, Jesus offers a different kind of salvation – the freedom that comes from knowing that whatever the circumstances we are known and loved by God. We know this because God in Christ was prepared to share our human death that we might share his risen life. And he invites us to lay our burdens on him. Sometimes it is only when we are at our lowest ebb, in the place of deepest loneliness and isolation that we can truly appreciate the strength and power of God's love, a love which is stronger than even death itself, a love which will not let us go. In the words of that familiar hymn by George Mathieson,

*“O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be”.*

Today as we enter Holy Week some of us already have candles and rainbows and teddies in our windows. But I am inviting you to add to that collection a green branch – a sign of the life that Christ offers. And as you follow Jesus through a Holy Week marked by the struggle against Covid 19, let that green branch be a reminder to you that beyond, and yes even in the midst of pain and suffering and sorrow, God’s love is present and will not let you go.

Prayers for Others

Lift to God now in prayer

- Those who are ill or in hospital around the world
- All NHS staff and essential workers
- those who are seeking to manage and fight this global pandemic
- family, friends and neighbours
- other people and situations God has place on your heart today
- the Church that we might offer a faithful witness to Christ through this time

The Lord’s prayer

Our Father,
Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever,
Amen

CH4 365

1. *Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
Hark! All the tribes “Hosanna” cry;
O Saviour meek, pursue thy road
With palms and scattered garments strowed.*

2. *Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
O Christ, thy triumphs now begin
O'er captive death and conquered sin.*
3. *Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
The winged squadrons of the sky
Look down with sad and wondering eyes
To see the approaching sacrifice.*
4. *Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
Thy last and fiercest strife is nigh;
The Father on his sapphire throne
Awaits his own anointed Son.*
5. *Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain
Then take, O God, thy power and reign.*

NOTICES

Green Branches

Place a green branch in your window to mark Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week.

Holy Week Together. Holy Week Together is an initiative by Gordon Presbytery to enable people to engage with worship from their homes during Holy Week. Meditations, resources and videos will be posted on the [Presbytery of Gordon web page](#) and [Facebook page](#) for direct access. Or you can follow the link from the [Home page](#) of this website.

Pastoral Care

The minister is available to help with any pastoral emergencies. Tel 851295

Care for the Community

If you hear of anyone needing practical help during this time then please contact Ruth Tel 851887