

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 24 March 2024  
Palm Sunday  
The Revd Walt Johnson

## Call to Worship

To the bidding, “Make way, make way”, please respond with  
**For Jesus is the King of kings.**

We come to worship as we are. Make way, make way!

**For Jesus is the King of kings!**

We bring to God our sadness and our joy. Make way, make way!

**For Jesus is the King of kings!**

We cry out to God against brokenness and injustice. Make way, make way!

**For Jesus is the King of kings!**

We hunger for the Bread of Life and thirst for the Living Water. Make way, make way!

**For Jesus is the King of kings!**

We call on God’s holy name in the power of the Holy Spirit. Make way, make way!

**For Jesus is the King of kings!**

## Prayer of Approach

Loving God, You, who are our Creator;

You, who, in Jesus, are our Saviour;

You, who, in the Holy Spirit, are our Life-Giver;

we come to You and give You thanks and praise.

We praise You for the freedom which we enjoy to worship You;

we remember our Sisters and Brothers in Christ who must meet in secret.

For all that we are and all that we have, we praise You.

As we gather together for worship today,

may it be with a sense that Jesus is here, too:

may our eyes be open to see Him,

may our hearts be ready to be seen by Him,

may our worship be worthy of His presence,

may our ears be open to hear the Word:

may we see the world through His eyes,

responding in service and love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

## Prayer of Confession

There are times when we have all failed to love others, failed to love God, and we have even failed to love ourselves. We bring these now to God. Listen for the Words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (11:28-30) "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

*Silence*

To the bidding "Lord, have mercy," please respond with **Christ, have mercy.**

O God, you know us well.

We are quick to speak of faith, but slow to live it fully.

We shout "hosanna" as Jesus approaches,

as did the people of Jerusalem many years ago;

but we do not want him to come too close - not close enough to really see...

Lord, have mercy...**Christ, have mercy.**

O God, you know us well.

We are quick to claim faith in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour;

but, like the throng who greeted his entry into Jerusalem,

we are fickle, slow to live fully and everywhere as faithful disciples.

We know where we fail...

Lord, have mercy...**Christ, have mercy.**

O God, you know us well. We are quick to want the blessings of faithfulness;

but, like the Twelve who spent the last week with him,

we are slow to accept the pain and suffering of authentic Christ-like living.

Forgive our weakness and fear...

Lord, have mercy... **Christ, have mercy.**

*[Source: United Methodist Church, USA; introduction: Walt Johnson]*  
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/prayer-of-confession-for-palm-sunday>

## Assurance of Pardon

Listen for the assurance of pardon as found these Words of Jesus: "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus also says, "Come, follow Me." Thanks be to God. Amen.

## Prayer of Illumination

Lord Jesus, You who are the Word made flesh:  
You say to us: "One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes the mouth of God."

Lord Jesus, You say to us: "I am the bread of life.  
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,  
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Lord Jesus, our prayer is in the words of Your disciples at Emmaus:  
"Were our hearts not burning within us while...  
he was opening the scriptures to us?" Amen.

## Sermon Notes

### *Introduction*

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is recorded in all four canonical Gospels. In the Church's liturgical calendar, we recall those events today on Palm Sunday. I have called this service "shifting perspectives" because of the way in which the crowds shifted their perspective regarding Jesus. On Palm Sunday, they were welcoming Him as King, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, the fulfilment of prophecy. However, a few days later, the crowds had changed their perspective on Jesus, and they were calling for Him to be crucified. The Lectionary offers two sets of readings, depending on the approach you might wish to take on Palm Sunday. Either focusing on the events of Palm Sunday, or taking a longer view with Jesus' Passion narrative.

### *The Passion Narrative*

If your local church does not have a service on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, then you might wish to take this approach, so that your congregation can revisit the Jesus arrest, trial and Crucifixion, ahead of Easter Sunday next week.

### *Readings*

*Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 50:4-9*

The Psalm echoes the crowd's rejection of Jesus, His suffering and sacrifice on the Cross in the context of atonement and salvation. The short reading from Isaiah is similar, echoing Jesus' blameless nature, and being subject to rejection and violence.

## *Philippians 2:5-11*

This very well-known passage is an inspiration for many hymns. Scholars believe that Philippians is one of Paul's earlier letters, making this passage of the first recorded statements of faith in respect of Jesus' nature.

## *Mark 14:1-15:47*

This is a very long Bible reading, one which you could readily divide into sections and be read by different readers, maybe having some pauses, allowing time for reflection. Another way to split up the text would be to sing a verse from a Passiontide hymn in between the sections.

## *Palm Sunday*

If you choose to focus on Palm Sunday for your service, the Lectionary offers different readings:

## *Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29*

The set Psalm is referenced by Mark (and the other Gospel writers) in verses 25-26 – "Blessed be the One who comes in the name of the Lord".

## *Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:26-16 or Matthew 21:1-11 or Luke 19:28-40*

In this Lectionary Year (B), Mark is the preferred reading. As is often the case, the parallel readings in Matthew and Luke use Mark as a source. Matthew, Mark and Luke all describe Jesus' foreknowledge of the donkey and for the Disciples to collect it, ready for Jesus to ride on it into Jerusalem. I have chosen to use the readings from Luke for several reasons: Luke's version contains a short exchange with "some Pharisees" who ask Jesus to silence the crowd. This allows us to ask questions as to why they might want this: are they afraid for the people and what the Romans might do? Or are they afraid of losing their own political power? Is Jesus' response to them that God's will cannot be hushed up?

If you use video clips in your service sometimes, you may wish to use "Hosanna" from the Rice/Lloyd-Webber musical "Jesus Christ, Superstar!". This song reflects Luke's version of Palm Sunday.

Another strand which you might wish to explore is the significance of the young donkey. The young donkey was probably terrified – someone riding on its back for the first time, being led into a very noisy crowd. There is a pastoral strand here – how do we cope when we are thrust into new experiences. There are many life experiences which we encounter for the first time as we grow up, which are both exciting and terrifying at the same time!

Another aspect about the donkey is the clear choice (and fulfilment of prophecy in Zechariah 9:9) to use a 'lowly' animal, rather than a majestic horse or expensive chariot. You may wish to consider by way of introduction the ways in which we can travel – simple and humble ways (on foot, by bus, train); or the car we choose to drive (a functional or luxury model)? One way to explore this would be to consider how King Charles III travelled to his coronation, or how government ministers travel.

A more challenging notion in the Palm Sunday narrative which looks forward to Good Friday is the significant change in the crowd's opinion about Jesus. It is pressure from the crowd that results in Pilate's decision to have Jesus crucified. We make the assumption that those cheering Jesus on Palm Sunday are mainly the same people who were in the procurator's courtyard yelling "Crucify Him" five days later.

Without the crowd changing their mood, pressuring Pilate, Jesus would not have gone to the Cross. After all, Pilate wanted to have Jesus flogged and released. If Pilate had had his way, the work of salvation completed in Jesus' death would not have happened as it is recorded, becoming the bedrock of our faith as Christians. Herein lies a mystery.

### *Ideas for introduction*

*Journeys* – how do we prepare for any journey we make? What preparations do we make for everyday journeys? What types of transport do we choose and why? Consider powerful people – kings/queens, government ministers – how does their way of travelling differ? Can you think of other contemporary occasions where joyous processions take place? Think maybe about a victorious sporting team winning a trophy and honoured in their home town by the fans. Think about Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey, a humble animal. What sort of animal do you think the Roman Procurator Pilate would have ridden?

*Shifting opinions* – invite people to think about someone they did not like at first but their opinion changed for the better? What caused the change in opinion? Or invite people to think about someone they liked to begin with, but now they would prefer not to have anything to do with them? What caused the change in opinion? Can people come up with examples of well-known people whose popularity has increased significantly or decreased? This might help people to consider the way in which the crowds of Jesus' time changed their opinion of Jesus so quickly in a few days. Jerusalem was a big city by ancient standards. Were there pro-Jesus people who turned to being anti-Jesus as the week went on. Or maybe just two different groups of people who made their views known on the Sunday and the Friday.

## Affirmation of Faith

*Let us affirm our faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, using the words of Paul in his letter to the church in Philippi:*

Let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though He was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied Himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
He humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.  
Therefore God also highly exalted Him  
and gave Him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

## Prayers of Concern

Empty, broken, here we stand: touch us with Your healing hand.  
Take our arrogance and pride: wash us in Your mercy's tide.  
Loving God, we pray for the brokenness in our world:  
especially we pray for those whose lives are torn apart by violence, war and disaster.  
We pray for leaders of governments and business  
that they might turn from narrow self-interest to global concern.

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

When our faith has all but gone: give us the strength to carry on.  
When our dreams have turned to dust, in you, O Lord, we put our trust.  
Loving God, we pray for those whose strength is failing.  
We pray for those who are unwell, in body, mind or spirit.  
We pray for all those who work and serve in health and social care.  
In the silence of our hearts, we name those known to us in need:

*pause*

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

When our hearts are cold as ice: Your love speaks of sacrifice.  
Love that sets the captives free: pour compassion down on us.  
Loving God, we pray for those who find themselves in desperate situations,  
not knowing where to turn.  
We pray for refugees and seekers of asylum.  
We pray for those in our own communities whose lives are in turmoil.  
We pray for those who provide support – practically, emotionally and financially.

*pause*

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

You are the voice that calms our fears: You are the laughter that dries our tears.  
You are our music, our refrain: help us sing Your song again.  
Loving God, we pray for those who are bereaved,  
and for those for whom anniversaries occur at this time.  
We give thanks for Your eternal promise that You will be with us always,  
even to the end of the age.  
We praise You thanks for the beauty of creation,  
the joy which the diverse creativity in many forms enriches our lives,  
and for the times our souls rejoice!

*pause*

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

Humble heart of holiness: kiss us with Your tenderness.  
Jesus, faithful friend and true: all we are, we give to You.  
Loving God, we pray for the church throughout the world,  
and the church families of which we are apart.  
We pray for our United Reformed Church:  
we pray for the unity of the Body of Christ.  
We give thanks for Your faithfulness which never ends,  
and especially we pray for those who are taking the first steps in faith.

*pause*

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

We bring all our prayers together, as we say the prayer Jesus taught to us say...

*Based on "Empty, broken" Nick and Anita Haigh © 2000 Break of Day Music  
(adapted Walt Johnson)*

## Blessing

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord turn His smile towards you and give you peace. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
<i>Focusing on Palm Sunday itself</i>				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
All Glory Laud and Honour	208	364	262	9
All People That On Earth Do Dwell*	712	63	1	20
At the Name of Jesus	261	458	317	41
Oh Freedom / Jesus Is Coming / Freedom Is Coming			697	
Give Me Joy In My Heart / Give Me Oil In My Lamp	523		76	167
Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the Highest			263	242
King of Kings and Lord of Lords	281			398
Majesty			333	454
Make Way, Make Way, For Christ The King		279	264	457
Rejoice The Lord Is King	657	449	335	575
Ride , Ride On In Majesty	209	365	265	580
We Have A King Who Rides A Donkey	210			
You Shall Go Out With Joy	415	804	487	796
<i>If using the Passion reading</i>				
How Deep The Father's Love For Us			549	988
In Christ Alone			351	1072
Meekness and Majesty		356	362	465
My Song Is Love Unknown	207	399	277	478
Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?	227	403	285	745
When I Survey The Wondrous Cross	217	392	287	755

RS – Rejoice & Sing | CH4 – Church Hymnary 4 | StF – Singing the Faith | MP – Mission Praise

\*There's a splendid contemporary metrical tune by Roger Jones you might like to explore  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-tKrSY9h4o&ab\\_channel=ChristianMusicMinistries](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-tKrSY9h4o&ab_channel=ChristianMusicMinistries)