

twelvebaskets



PALM SUNDAY A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **theworshipcloud.com**

Palm Sunday - Year A
5th April 2020



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

677 STF – Christ is made the sure foundation OR

789 STF – Holy, holy, holy Lord

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

276 STF – Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim OR

1 STF – All people that on earth do dwell

Readings: Matthew 21:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Hymn

64 STF – Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you OR

264 STF – Make way, make way, for Christ the king

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

318 STF – Christ, our king before creation OR

593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

263 STF – Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest OR

265 STF – Ride on, ride on in majesty!

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on www.theworshipcloud.com.

Copyright for content is retained by the original author / contributor.

www.theworshipcloud.com

Call to Worship

In this time of gathering
accept the offering that we bring,
the songs we sing,
hearts open in prayer,
ears attuned to your word,
your children journeying
to Easter and beyond.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

677 STF – Christ is made the sure foundation OR

789 STF – Holy, holy, holy Lord

Opening Prayers

A prayer of adoration

Jesus, Lamb of God,
when you walked this earth
you did not consider
heavenly equality,
though it was yours to choose,
but took the role of servant
and in humility and obedience
allowed the rough nails of our sin
to be hammered into your flesh
for the sake of our salvation.

And so it is
that we acknowledge you
as Lord of our lives
and Lord of all,
to the glory of God the Father,
Son and Spirit, three in one.

Amen.

¹ Taken from The Act of Prayer by John Birch

A prayer of confession

May we be listening always
for your familiar voice
and obedient to your call,
whether quiet whisper
in a sacred space
or thunder's roar
cutting through the bustle
of a city street.

Forgive us those times when
you ask us to stay alert
for your sake
and, eyes heavy,
like your disciples
we fall asleep.

Forgive us our Gethsemane moments.

May we be listening always
for your familiar voice
and obedient to your call.

Amen.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Some may mock
and others conspire against us
for the faith we profess
and the lives that we live,
but we shall praise and thank you,
our Lord and Saviour,
the rock upon which we stand,
the strength that we rely on,
our firm foundation
in a world that builds
on sand.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

² Taken from The Act of Prayer by John Birch

All Age Talk

Today is Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, when we celebrate Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey – a moment of great celebration, as well as the beginning of the difficult time of Holy Week, where Jesus eventually faces his death.

Let's listen to the imagined thoughts of one of his followers on that day.

[Pause. Read on slowly, setting the scene].

It was wonderful. After the long walk to Jerusalem, to stand on the Mount of Olives gazing over the whole city; the walls on the opposite side of the valley, the temple, the home and centre of our faith in the one God.

Jesus had arranged for two of the disciples to go into a nearby village and borrow a donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem on. As he started out down into the valley, crowds were coming out of Jerusalem straight for us, lining the road, throwing palms and their shawls and cloaks onto the road for him to walk on. The din was enormous, shouts of joy, of praises to God echoed all around. It was as if everyone had come out to welcome Jesus.

It was exciting; would he be crowned as king in Jerusalem? It almost seemed like it. Though he'd said he was never to be called a king, he was a servant of God. Many prophets and a few kings had ridden on a donkey into Jerusalem as a sign of peace.

To anyone who had listened to and thought about Jesus' words and teachings, it was obvious what he was saying by these symbols. No-one cared about that just then, it was a time of unleashed joy and hope brightening the lives of those who suffered under Roman rule. The event had seemed to take over and mean more than it should have.

Then we were frightened. Here was Jesus riding into Jerusalem very publicly, so all would know, and at the beginning of the Passover week. The Temple leaders had made their feelings known many times over recent months; of their dislike of Jesus and how he taught, of the stories aimed at the leaders. Their anger was seething, but they had never stopped him.

We had tried to persuade Jesus not to come into Jerusalem publicly this time; however he just ignored our protestations, saying we do not know God's mind. He also said that no prophet ever died but in Jerusalem

It was a heady mixture; exciting, noisy, wonderful and a terrible foreboding deep in our hearts. Would the worst happen ...? How long could we last before falling down exhausted ...? But we did not say anything to each other, but we all knew and felt it!.³

³ Taken from Palm Sunday Dialogues by David J Woodman

Hymn:

276 STF – Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim OR
1 STF – All people that on earth do dwell

Readings: Matthew 21:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Hymn:

64 STF – Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you OR
264 STF – Make way, make way, for Christ the king

Reflections on the readings

Jill Baker shares for us some of her reflections on how today's lectionary speaks to her.

'Open to me the gates of righteousness', cries the psalmist... and as I hear those words, especially on Palm Sunday, certain images come to my mind... I wonder what pictures they create for you?

- If you are a fan of 'The Lord of the Rings', you may see Aragorn forcing open the mighty gates of Helm's Deep.
If 'Frozen' is more your thing, then you will be singing along with Elsa and Anna as the gates of Arendelle are finally opened after years of shutting the sisters in – or shutting the world out.
- If your cultural tastes include Stainer's 'Crucifixion' then it will be the chorus 'The procession to Calvary' with its repeated phrase, 'Fling wide the gates' which becomes your ear worm.
- Perhaps you or someone you know has served a prison sentence and knows what it is to focus every hope and thought on the day when those gates will be opened to allow release.

We have gates to keep things in and we have gates to keep things out and the opening and closing of gates plays a part in our lives in all sorts of ways... Maybe we can talk about the opening of gates that have been important to us after the service.

As I prepared these thoughts Storm Ciara raged around the UK – I was stuck south of the border and couldn't return to my home in Glasgow. Images from Euston station closing its gates because of overcrowding filled our screens; what a terrible thought to imagine never being allowed out and spending the rest of your days at Euston station!

The old city of Jerusalem is today surrounded by a wall which contains 8 gates; although one, the Gate of Mercy, also known as the Eastern Gate or Golden Gate, is now also a solid wall and is said by Jews to be awaiting a miraculous opening when the Messiah comes and the dead are raised. The gate was blocked off in the early

16th Century when the present walls were built by the Turkish Sultan 'Suleiman the Magnificent'. But Jerusalem has been a walled city since its earliest appearance in the bible around 1200 years previously, when David captured it by leading his army in through the drains, because the walls were impregnable.

Gates in walls are always important because they are places of entry and exit and places of encounter. Often, as in many Old Testament stories, gates are the places where justice is done, where trade takes place, where deals and bargains are made. Gates make good places to beg and hope and wish. Walls and gates are very significant in the religious history of Jerusalem and perhaps that makes our familiar Palm Sunday story even more dramatic and wonderful.

With only a few days of his life on earth remaining, Jesus rides into the city of Jerusalem, most probably entering by the very gate which is now closed off, the Eastern or Golden Gate, the Gate of Mercy! We picture the scene year by year, and again images spring to mind:

- Shots from Jesus Christ Superstar or other dramatic and cinematic portrayals of the life of Jesus may play before our eyes;
- Perhaps we have been involved in Palm Sunday processions through our own streets, or in other lands – sometimes with real donkeys and all the fun that brings!
- Some here may have been to the Passion Play in Oberammergau and seen this story enacted on the vast stage there.
- Others may have been to Jerusalem and can visualise the events in that context.

On Palm Sunday 2017, I joined around 10,000 others from all over the world to meet at the top of the Mount of Olives and follow the route Jesus probably took into the city – although of course we had to enter not by the Golden Gate but by the Lion Gate. Today as we meet here, that will be happening again in Jerusalem as Christians from many lands take the opportunity to show solidarity with the tiny Christian population of Palestine on this special day. With such a vast crowd in such a tiny city, singing, shouting, waving palm branches and palm crosses, following bands and choirs and ministers and priests of every denomination, amidst a plethora of national flags from many lands it was total chaos... perhaps not unlike the first Palm Sunday which we mark today!

On that occasion, as Matthew tells us, Jesus approached the city gates on a humble donkey and as he did so the resounding cries of Psalm 118 ring loud in our ears...

- 'Open to me the gates of righteousness',
- 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord',
- 'Hosanna'!

That word Hosanna probably meant 'Save us' initially, but it becomes mixed up with a shout of praise as well – it is a cry which recognises two things; a need for help

and that Jesus is the one who can meet that need. Matthew tells us it is a very large crowd and again images come to my mind... a picture of the whole world crowded around a gate crying out for help, for life, for goodness, for salvation...

What then can we do on this Palm Sunday in 2020, when the world, in all sorts of ways, is indeed crying out for help, crying out to be saved, but maybe doesn't look to Jesus to open the gates of salvation? Can we be a people who open those gates – both for ourselves and for others?

Looking at the story as Matthew tells it to us; we see that the crowds did three things:

Firstly, they cut branches from trees and used them to welcome Jesus. The waving of branches was an integral part of the ancient Jewish Festival of Tabernacles, referred to as the psalm we heard declares, 'Bind up the festal procession with branches...' Matthew's original readers will have made the connection between branches and worship and recognise that this man riding humbly on a donkey is one to be worshipped.

Worship can be a gate-opening experience! When we offer ourselves to God in worship something happens which speaks of the presence and the glory of God and can open the gates of people's hearts.

Secondly the crowd shouted 'Hosanna, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'. They recognised that Jesus was the one they needed. Sometimes the gates which have to be opened are the gates with which we fence ourselves off from any sort of need. The culture of today can lead us to think we must be strong, we must be perfect, we must be self-sufficient and able to cope with anything.

But the truth is that we are not supposed to live like that – we are supposed to live in relationship with a God who will supply all our needs – if we recognise that we have them. Shouting 'Hosanna' today is one way to open those gates and let God into our lives.

Thirdly, the crowd answered questions & pointed others to Jesus too. When the whole city, in turmoil, asks 'Who is this?' the crowds replied 'This is Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee'.

Put like that it sounds easy, but we're not always very good at doing it... at answering questions openly, being willing to say 'It's Jesus who makes the difference in my life. Come and meet him.' That too can open gates for our friends and neighbours.

On this Palm Sunday, let's open the gates we find in ourselves and open gates for others too so that the King of glory can enter in!

Let us pray:

God of the gateway, we worship you today, recognising that you are worthy of all we can offer. Open something in us, free us to worship you in spirit and truth.

Jesus Christ who, by your death and resurrection, opened the gates to salvation for all, we worship you today, recognising that we need you. We can't make it on our own after all.

Holy Spirit, mediator and energiser, come amongst us, come amongst our friends and family, that gates may be opened and lives transformed by your power and to the glory of God.

Amen.

Questions for discussion or further reflection *[You may wish to break people into small groups and give them 5-10 minutes to discuss these questions or, if you have a small congregation, you might like to discuss them as a whole group, perhaps arranging the seating to allow people to converse more easily].*

- Have there been gates which have been significant in your life? In what ways?
- Palm Sunday is a day to show solidarity with other Christians around the world; how can you do that from where you live?
- Do you sometimes feel that you have to be perfect and strong and self-sufficient all the time? How does it feel to reflect that perhaps God wants us to express our need for help?
- Think about your friends and family members who don't worship. Are there ways you could open gates for them?⁴

[After the conversation, pause for a moment to allow people to reflect on all they have said and heard, then introduce the next hymn].

Hymn:

318 STF – Christ, our king before creation OR

593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

Prayers of intercession

God, as we enter Holy Week, we thank you for the freedom we have to worship, the safety and the protection that we are granted through the laws of our country to learn about and proclaim your name freely.

May we never take for granted the opportunity we have to openly declare the good news in the places you have called us to be. We pray for those without that opportunity, for those meeting in secret, who risk their lives simply by Worshipping you. Sustain and protect those who worship you today in places of threat and danger, may they know that they are in the prayers of your people.

God, as we enter Holy Week, we pray for our leaders, for those called to shepherd your flock, may they know you ever more deeply. Grant them wisdom and

⁴ Reflection and discussion questions written by Jill Baker

discernment as they strive to lead us into being the Church that you have called us to be.

As they give out day by day and week by week, we pray that they would be filled to overflowing by your spirit. We pray also for the leaders of our country, may your voice be heard in their discussions, may your heart be witnessed in their actions and may your will be done through them.

Strengthen those in government who know you, give them courage to speak up and step out, we pray that through their witness others will come to know you.

God, as we enter Holy Week, we pray for those we know who are suffering. We pray that to those living in darkness you would provide light, to the hurting that you would provide healing, and to the mourning that you would provide comfort.

Thank you that, in your very nature, you care about us and understand our pain, worries and fears, this week we pray that you would open our hearts to encountering you more closely than we ever have before.

As we journey through this week and encounter the confusion of Thursday, the darkness of Friday and the hopelessness of Saturday may we hold firmly to the joy, hope and certainty of Sunday.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

We welcome you into our lives, Lord God – into our cities, towns, villages, homes and hearts. As we welcome you, crying Hosanna, we offer these gifts to you, inviting you to use them, and to use us, to see your kingdom come, the gates of heaven opened, your glory revealed.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

263 STF – Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest OR

265 STF – Ride on, ride on in majesty!

⁵ Prayers of intercession by Lauren Brabbs

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

Go out into Holy Week, clinging to hope amongst the darkness.
Go out with joy, knowing that resurrection is around the corner.
Go out with peace, and seek a better world.

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker