



Gathering Reflection (adapt the imagery for symbolic not literally)

Come into the streets with me!
Come to where the crowds will be,
see a strange and gentle king
on a donkey travelling.

REFRAIN:

Come and follow my leader,
come and follow my leader,
Jesus Christ is riding by,
come and follow my leader!

All the people shout his name,
waving branches, sing his fame,
throw their coats upon his road,
glad to praise the Son of God.

If the soldiers draw their swords,
will we dare to sing these words,
be his friends for just a day,
cheer him on, then run away?

Jesus goes where things are rough,
Jesus knows when life is tough,
always comes to all, as friends,
so his story never ends.

REFRAIN

Come and follow my leader,
come and follow my leader,
Jesus Christ is riding by,
come and follow my leader! (Shirley Murray Alleluia Aotearoa #22)

Song: Sing praise and thanksgiving,

Sing praise and thanksgiving let all creatures living
now worship their maker with gladness and song;
all glory and honour we come to him bringing:
O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!

Our lives of his making he brings to their waking;
in darkness he held us in his gracious care,
now into the light we are called from our sleeping:
O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!

Lord, frame our desiring to do your requiring,
that unto your glory be all that we do;
and where we have faltered, give strength and give healing:
O praise to the Almighty, sing praise to our God!

Welcome to worship through Morialta Uniting Church, wherever you are and whatever time this might be for you. We might be one, or two or three, but we connect together as a wide reaching community of God's people today.

Palm Sunday tells of how people removed their cloaks and spread them out in front of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. The cloak we wear every day to face the world is both the persona we wish to present, and our defence against the elements. May we be willing to lay down our defences and disguises, at the feet of the One who sees us as we really are. And then, set free for worship, may we offer our praises with open hearts and lives.

Call to Worship

Grief and joy are about to be mixed.
Palm Sunday, ushers in the most poignant week in the church calendar.
It begins with shouts of praise as Jesus of Nazareth, hero of the common people, enters the Holy City, yet in so doing, marches inexorably towards his bloody death.

The stone which the builders rejected,
has become the keystone of the corner.
Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!
This is the day which the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Acknowledgement of Land

This is God's Land. Many have gone before who have honoured God by caring for this Land, in the way they have lived and stories they have shared.
We give thanks for the Kurna people, who have held as sacred the duty of protecting the Land and living in harmony with it.
May God honour and bless them – now and to eternity.
Let us pray:
Deep Spirit, Creator and Sustainer, present within all things,
We gather as a people, alive with hopes, fears, longings, joy and weariness.
We come in worship,
we come in community, separated by space yet one in Christ
we come in expectant vulnerability.
In peace, may we continue our journey from Lent into Holy Week.
May worship be filled with a sense of wonder, stillness and alertness
a sense of fragile longing about events to come, a sense of what it means to be part of our sacred humanity. Amen.

***Holy is the week, Holy, consecrated,
belonging to God. We move from
hosannas to horror.*** (Ann Weems)

These words mark the beginning of our journey into Holy Week, leading us too quickly to Christ's suffering. We gather in the warmth of companionship and community at Christ's own invitation, united by his self-sacrificial love, called to love one another. But then the day will end, the sun will set, and darkness will descend.

Reading Mathew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying 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. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately.^[a]" ⁴This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵"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."⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd^[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The 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!"¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Song: Lord Jesus Christ you have come to us TiS 526

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,
you are one with us, Mary's son;
cleansing our souls from all their sin,
pouring your love and goodness in,
Jesus, our love for you we sing, living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, now and every day
teach us how to pray, Son of God.
You have commanded us to do
this in remembrance, Lord, of you:
into our lives your power breaks through, living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,
born as one of us, Mary's son;
led out to die on Calvary, risen from death to set us free,
living Lord Jesus, help us see you are Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, I would come to you,
live my life for you, Son of God.
All your commands I know are true,
your many gifts will make me new,
into my life your power breaks through, living Lord.

You know, God, that's really cool?
Crowds waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna!"
If anyone deserved that hype, Jesus did.
Yet, God, it also makes us sad. Sad because we know that in a few days
another crowd would get ugly and shout, "Crucify him."
That's zero-cool; like disgusting!
Dear God, help us to be loyal friends of Jesus today and everyday.
Amen! (Bruce Prewer)

Sermon

O we are in changing times. Nothing is certain. The day Jesus rode into Jerusalem, that day we call Palm Sunday, was also changing times for him, and for the followers of Jesus, and for all of history.

If that first palm Sunday was today, then I think it might have been very different, almost a non-event, because of social distancing and isolation.

I don't know if I would have gone out to see Jesus that day. I'd stay home and watched it on telly, ZOOM, Fb or Skype. I might light my candle in the lounge room, make a coffee and watch him arrive, and then turn over to Songs of Praise on the ABC.

One of the things about a procession or parade is that we are often the bystanders, the ones who make up the crowd, the ones who cheer and wave and watch as something or someone makes their way to their destination.

Today there are no parades, no stadium events, not even public gatherings

The Palm Sunday parade, is like any other pageant or parade, yet there is something about this one that is unique. Something made this parade special.

There is the crowd, the noise and then the object or person passing by. The story records the actions of the crowd, they got involved, they shouted, waved branches, laid down articles of clothing and sang praise songs to God. The crowd appears to be swept up in the emotion of the event, drawn in by the moment and ushered along.

Do you miss the crowds?

In the Gospel text today, there is a question "who is this?" which is spoken by the people in Jerusalem, to which comes the shout of reply, "this is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee".

We might ask the same question, who is this?

Who is this Jesus for today? For you?

Well, I think we should all know by now, by having journeyed with Jesus, as an onlooker, through John's gospel during Lent.

However, We could ask the same question about the Jesus we meet Matthew's Gospel and I think we would get a slightly different answer.

Let me make a brief comparison. John seems to portray, a kind of philosophical, spiritual focused Jesus dealing with issues such as knowledge, spirituality, wisdom, dialogue between individuals or small groups.

Matthew, on the other hand seems to have a very religious Jesus who seems to talk a lot about the kingdom of heaven, the Temple, Law, and in particular Hebrew prophecy.

The emphasis for Matthew is to link the fulfilment of Jewish biblical prophecy to Jesus, quoting Hebrew scripture as an authentication of who Jesus is

In John's Gospel, our focus readings during Lent, we have read long stories of encounters with everyday and ordinary people, each giving particular insight to the identity, and more importantly the role and purpose of Jesus.

The **Nicodemus** encounter tells us of Jesus as one who gives and is wisdom and knowledge.

The **woman** at the well identifies Jesus as the giver of life likened to a spring of living water, refreshment, life and eternity.

The **blind man** is healed physically and more so we discuss issues of spiritual blindness and sight, Jesus being the light of the world and opening inner blind eyes.

Finally Jesus is revealed as the one who gives life and who is the resurrection in the story of **Lazarus**.

In a number of other places throughout John's gospel we find the 'I am sayings' of Jesus, I am the good shepherd, the door, bread of life, way, truth and life and so on.

So, do we know Jesus? I mean, have we got to know him? We have heard the stories, shared the insights, but have we understood? Have we taken it in? Have we become a follower? Have we arrived at the parade? Have we a palm branch ready to wave?

Palm Sunday is a good time to ask ourselves the same question, who is this? Who is Jesus?

We spend time during advent leading up to Christmas and the birth of Jesus, one of the high points of the Christian year, asking who is this child? We do the same during lent. Who is this Jesus? Asks the crowd, asks you and me?

It's a personal question and it requires a personal response. We can be like the disciples and respond saying what others say, but today we ask ourselves, and for ourselves. Who is this?

The whole point of John's Gospel, and others, is that one is introduced to Jesus as the one who gives life, spiritual and life in all its fullness, who has shown us the face of God, who has called us to follow the ways of love.

Answering the question, "who is this?" requires a **faith** response.

Is this Jesus just a good man, maybe a bit disillusioned? Is Jesus a revolutionary who rides by and ends up on a cross, claiming to be a somebody?

Or is Jesus the one, the Messiah, who rides by and ends up on a cross, taking upon himself all that we are

and all that we are not as a sacrifice, as an act of love and grace, and forgiveness, for us?

This is the one who in just a few short days will experience a massive popularity turn around. Today we sing all praise and glory, but in less than a week – abandonment, betrayal, alone, dead.

And Jesus does this not for himself but for all creation.

Palm Sunday and holy week invite us to be both happy and sad.

Wherever you are, at whatever time this might be for you I invite you to respond today, if you wish, as an act of faith, affirmation and commitment, to mark the sign of the cross, with your finger on the back of your hand, symbolising your answer to, who is Jesus.

And may this sign of the cross remind you of your faith, in these shadow times and also your journey with Jesus into this special and holy week of Easter.

Prayer

In the quiet moments, in the still places,
I can sometimes hear it;
An urgent voice, echoing through the wildernesses of the world,
and of my heart calling me to prepare and to participate
in the new world that wants to be born.

How can I be part of something that I haven't seen,
that I struggle even to conceptualise, let alone understand?
Yet, still the voice calls, and my heart stirs.

This world exists, Jesus, in the Gospel you preached,
in the stable and the cross and the empty tomb,
in Baptismal waters and Eucharistic meals
in your constant calling, and your constant coming.

And so we praise you for this world, and for the dream that we can learn to know it here and now even as you do.
Amen.

News and notices. How are you going?

Remember to contact each other, find new ways to stay in connection, support those who are finding things tough. We take this time to acknowledge the offerings that have been made that support the work of God's church in this place and beyond

Prayer

The crowds offered you their coats to walk on,
they waved palm branches, honouring your presence.

Today we honour you, Lord,
with our offerings, those dedicated by electronic means
We lay these gifts before you ,humble expressions of our love,
a public display of affection for our King of kings, Lord of lord and Prince of Peace Amen.

Song: Take this moment ATOK 414

Take this moment, sign and space;
Take my friends around;
Here among us make the place
Where your love is found.

Take the time to call my name,
Take the time to mend
Who I am and what I've been,
All I've failed to tend.

Take the tiredness of my days,
Take my past regret,
Letting your forgiveness touch
All I can't forget

Take the little child in me
Scared of growing old;
Help me here to find my worth
Made in God's own mould.

Take my talents, take my skills,
Take what's yet to be;
Let my life be yours, and yet
Let it still be me.

Prayers for others

Thank you God for your triumphal entry into our world each and every day.
The slow motion explosion of buds on the trees proclaim "Hosanna!"
Rushing water, falling from heaven, gurgling to the sea, proclaims "Hosanna!"
The changing colour of the falling leaves of autumn proclaims, "Hosanna!"
And the beauty of a baby's fingers, the softness of their cheek proclaims your praise!

We long to join this chorus, giving you thanks and praise for who you are,
for all you have created, all you are creating.
Thank you for sending Jesus, who showed us your love for all creation,
your love for us.

He opened our eyes to see your kingdom come here on earth.
Forgive us for the times where we have gone about our own business,
concerned with many things, oblivious to the needs of those around us,
oblivious to the call of your love in our heart.

God of grace, equip us to be your servants, listening, eager, ready.

Thank you for your presence in our world, even in virus-filled places.
We hear of people sick, of people dying, and rules of isolation.
We are tempted to despair, and to think that you have forsaken us.
We are tempted to think that you are powerless.

Give us a vision of your entry into our world as the Prince of peace,
changing hearts, changing our hearts, one by one, creating a host of peacemakers who say no to violence, a crowd of carers and loving neighbors

Today we pray for all medical people, social leaders and emergency workers.

God of great deeds, open our hearts to be your hearts, our hands to be your hands, our arms, to be your loving arms for all who need our presence.

We ask all these things, in the name of Jesus, our Lord, Amen.

Song Deep in the human heart (Tune: DIADEMATA Crown him with many crowns)

Deep in the human heart
The fires of justice burn;
With visions of a world renewed
Through radical concern.
As Christians we are called
To set the captives free,
To overthrow the evil powers
And end hypocrisy.

This is our task today,
To build a world of peace;
A world of justice, freedom, truth,
Where kindness will increase;
A world from hunger freed,
A world where people share,
Where every person is of worth
And no-one lives in fear.

Taking the step of faith,
We leave the past behind
And move into the future's world
With open heart and mind.
By grace we work with Christ,
As one community,
To bring new hope and fuller life
To all humanity. **(Hope is our song #19)**

Blessing

Go gladly on your way as those who have recognised the Palm Sunday man as the key to the healing of the world.
Hosanna! Wonderful is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
The amazing grace of Christ Jesus will cover you,
The enduring love of God will encircle you,
The sure friendship of the Spirit will inspire you,
both today and evermore. Amen.