

Bathurst Uniting Church
Sunday 5 April, 2020
Palm Sunday

Video: “Hosanna ”

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1. Welcome and introduction

Welcome, everyone, to our service this morning, as we come at last, after our long Lenten journey, to the joys, and sorrows, and joys of Holy Week. Today, we celebrate the Festival of Palms: remembering Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, hailed by the crowds that lined his way, waving palms and singing ‘Hosanna!’...

It may seem strange to imagine scenes of celebration, at this time of grief and uncertainty; to imagine crowds packing the streets, at this time of isolation and quarantine... But such is the roller-coaster ride of this week... Remembering that these same crowds, barely five days later, would be shouting ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’... Remembering that the high hopes of Palm Sunday must give way to the deeper hope, the faith-stretching hope, of the Easter story...

As we gather – even from our homes, many of which are on Wiradjuri land:

We acknowledge the
Wiradjuri nation, the first
inhabitants of this place.

**We honour them for their
custodianship of the land on
which many of us live, work and worship.**

We affirm again this day that, though we are many, we are one Body in Christ, belonging to one another –
even if we cannot gather in person.

We greet and honour Christ in each another.

2. Call to worship (Zechariah 9:9-10)

Children of God, rejoice!
Sing out in celebration, God's people!
See, your King is coming to you,
Righteous and bringing salvation –
yet gentle and humble, riding on a donkey,
Even on a donkey's foal.

**Let us open the gates of our hearts,
That the King of Glory may come in!**

He will proclaim peace to the nation.
His rule will extend from sea to sea and to the very ends of the earth.

**Blessed is the king who comes in the Lord's name.
Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!**

3. Hymn 1: Prepare the royal highway (*Together in Song* #346, verses 1, 4, 5)

We can't generally post the words to hymns for copyright reasons. They can easily be found on-line – or in any hymn-book you have at home. If you would like to borrow one of the church's copies of *Together in Song* for home use during the 'shut-down', please contact us and we'll arrange to drop off a copy.

4. Video: 'Virtual' Procession of Palms

Thank you to all our members who took part!

Music: 'Thousands singing Hosanna in Egypt'
SAT7Network
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QN-UB2c7TZE>

The song 'Hosanna hosanna' (in English)
(*Together in Song* #724)
Words and music by Carl Tuttle

5. Prayer of invocation

Friends, in such a time as this, it is important to re-affirm that God in Christ has promised *always* to be with us (Matt 28:20). But today, we celebrate his coming to his people in a special way. Our opening prayers are thus a prayer of invocation: of invitation. Let's pray.

The shout resounds: the King of Glory is coming to us!...

And our God arrives,
clothed in frail human flesh,
riding humbly on a donkey's foal...

This is not the first time you have come to us, O God...
The history of human affairs is the history of your arrival among us:
Creator, Purpose-Giver, Hope of Justice, Promise of Redemption...

The story of each of our lives is the story of your coming to us:
Comforter, Friend, Example, Challenger, Abundant-Life-Provider...

And so we praise you.

We say together:

**Open our eyes to your presence, Lord,
Even – especially – in such times as these.
Come to us again, Lord;
'Hosanna!' – 'Save us!' – again, Lord.
And be blessed and glorified among us.
For You are our God,
Even – especially – in such times as these.
Amen.**

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| Adapted from 'The King is Coming' © 2015 John van de Laar Accessed at: https://sacredise.com/prayers/season/holy-week/the-king-is-coming/ |
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6. Prayers of confession

And we continue in prayer...

Jesus, Lord,
We recognise that your life among us
was one of power in vulnerability,
glory in humility...

You came to confront the hatred and violence in us;
To throw over the tables of greed and injustice in us;
To overrule the fear and faithlessness in us...

Forgive us when we resist your coming;
When we reject or ignore you;
When we close our ears to your loving,
Healing,
Disturbing,
Transforming voice...

Let us hear it now...

And if some need to say, 'Help me'; and if some need to say, 'Heal me';
and if some need to say, 'Hold me'; and if some need to say, 'Forgive me'...
Then let these be said in the quietness of our hearts...

And we pray together:

**Hosanna: save us, O God.
Have mercy upon us.
Do not cease to come to us, and to call us to life.
Help us to embrace the way of the cross
And to live in the power of your death-defying love.
For Jesus' sake,
Amen.**

7. Assurance of forgiveness

'God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,' says the Gospel of John, 'but to save the world through Him' (John 3:17)

Know and be assured, then, that through the life and death and life of Jesus Christ, you are accepted and loved, forgiven and free.

We are accepted and loved, forgiven and free.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

8. Hymn: All glory, praise and honour (*Together in Song* #333, verses 1, 3, 5)

9. Kids' focus

Today, we remember the day when Jesus comes to the city of Jerusalem, and all the people shout and sing as if he was a *King* coming to his home city. In fact, many of them believed that Jesus was the King whom God had promised would come to them, and one day be king of the whole world...

I wonder what we think of, when we think about all the kings we've ever read or heard about... Crowns and robes, perhaps... A palace... A big throne... Lots of gold and treasure... And of course, armies: *big* armies...

Now if a king like that was coming into his city for a very important festival, I wonder what kind of transport he might use... Perhaps this? Or this?



In fact, when Jesus came into the city of Jerusalem, for the very important festival, his kingly mode of transport was... this.



Hmmm... I wonder what kind of king would come into his city on a *donkey*...

He would have to be a *very* different kind of king... Not a king with a crown or a palace, or a throne, or treasure, or armies... A king who loved people, and wanted to be close to them...

I wonder what the people of Jesus' day thought about that...

Let's find out, shall we, as Sharynne brings us our Bible reading.

10. Reading: 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,

"Say to 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.

And 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 king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heavens!'**

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking: 'Who *is* this?'

11. Message: Who is this?

'When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking: 'Who *is* this?'... Who *is* this, that even the wind and waves obey him; fresh from healing a man who had been born blind – reviving a man who had been dead for four days?... Who *is* this, the man identified by the Passover crowds as the one foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures: the Son of David, the anointed one of God, who would enter Jerusalem as its King to inaugurate God's kingdom of peace and justice on the earth at last? Who *is* this, the man Jesus of Nazareth, dusty and jogging along on a donkey...?

Not long before (Matthew 16:13-20), Jesus himself had asked the question, challenging his disciples to decide for themselves, on the basis of what they had seen and heard of him: 'Who do people say the Son of Man is? And you? Who do *you* say that I am?'

It is good to ask questions about Jesus – to think about the questions the people who knew him and saw him and heard about him had – because otherwise, on a day like today, it is all too easy to fall back on old ideas. To wave palms and sing 'Hosanna!' without knowing why we do it. To wave palms and sing 'hosanna!' because that's what churches have always done. To wave palms and sing 'hosanna!' without recognising that it is, in fact, a risky, radical, potentially world-shaking act. An answer – a risky, radical, potentially world-shaking answer – to the question: 'Who *is* this? Who do *you* say that I am?'

Jesus chose Jerusalem of all places – at this festival of all festivals, when the city was crowded with pilgrims, in a ferment of expectation. They'd heard about Jesus, seen what he'd been doing – heard the whispers: 'Only *God's anointed* could do these things!' It's Passover, the ancient celebration of God's intervention to free his people from slavery in Egypt – and the word is going round: 'The Messiah is coming, the rightful King of David's line, God's Chosen – to usher in a new liberation! Cry hosanna – wave the branches on the road to the temple!' Because that's how the Hebrew Scriptures portrayed this hoped-for climax of Israel's history. 'Bind the festal procession with branches going up to the altar,' cried the Psalmist. 'Sing out in celebration, God's people!,' cried the prophet, 'See your King is coming to you, righteous and bringing salvation, humble and riding a donkey!'

Who *is* this?, ask the crowds as Jesus rides into Jerusalem. Perhaps this is *he* – the *one* – the king the Scriptures foretold, who would cast off Roman oppression and establish the rule of Israel's God in all the world!

Who *is* this?, ask the Jewish religious authorities. Who is this that he would allow the people to hail him as God's anointed king, Israel's Messiah?

Who *is* this?, ask the Roman imperial authorities. Who is this having some kind of crazy triumphal procession – when on this very day, by the opposite gate-way on the other side of the city, another procession is entering Jerusalem for the Passover festivities: the Roman Imperial governor, Pontius Pilate, is processing in with his Roman military guard in full regalia, a show of imperial power and magnificence designed to quell *exactly* this kind of religious hysteria. That's what a 'triumphal entry' is *supposed* to look like...

Riding a *donkey*... We tend to think it's a sign of Jesus' humility: after all, Zechariah had written that the king entering Jerusalem would be – counter-intuitively – 'gentle, riding a donkey'. But Jesus is not only deliberately evoking a Scripture about gentleness and humility – he is deliberately evoking a Scripture about the *true King of Israel* taking possession of his city. The Romans wouldn't mistake the message: to them, this was a flat-out rejection of Empire, a direct subversion of the powers that be. It was enough to get a man noticed. It was enough to get a man crucified...

So, *Who is this?*... Not a man enjoying a well-deserved day of acknowledgement and celebration... Not a man signalling how meek and mild he is... This is a man riding head-on, eyes wide open, toward confrontation and its consequences... A man refusing to shy away from suffering, or to change his message or his methods in order to stay safe... A man willing to die rather than stop loving, to die rather than stop forgiving, to die rather than stop offering life... In a world where pain-avoidance and the protection of our comfort zones has become almost a religion in itself, this should be deeply challenging. *Who is this?* A man willing to die in order to live God's way in the face of all the demands and threats of Empire and its systems. A man willing to die to be God's true king to the lost, and least and left behind...

So, *Who is this?* Who is Jesus Christ for us, today, wherever we are, trying to juggle physical distance and social connection; trying to cope with loneliness and frustration and a dwindling stock of toilet paper; trying to find hope and courage and strength in stories of care and heroism – against the tide of selfishness and hoarding and fear and boredom and despair... *Who is he* – what *could* he be – to us, today, wherever we are, hungering for peace; comfort; connection; meaning and purpose; healing – and hope. Above all, hungering for hope...

Who is he for us, this Jesus Christ, in a time when coronavirus is shaking our world? Whoever he is... for thousands of believers during the Great Plague, the Black Death, he was – somehow – *enough*... For believers in solitary confinement, in political prisons, in Gulags, he has – somehow – been *enough*... For millions of believers facing persecution, or struggle – or even death – he *is* – somehow – *enough*...

I was thinking about how, some years ago, when Muslim women were being harassed on buses and trains in the wake of a terrorist attack, someone coined the Twitter hashtag 'I'll ride with you'. It was a gesture of solidarity: of standing *with* someone, of standing *up* for them... So on this Palm Sunday, as we look back at the earthly ministry of Jesus, now coming towards its end; as we look at him riding his ridiculous, dangerous donkey to confrontation with the powers of selfishness and suffering, greed and injustice, perhaps we have to ask ourselves *two* questions:

Who is this – or who *could* he be for us, if we let him?
And... *will we ride with him?*

12. Video: '40 Days: Palm Sunday'

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13. Hymn: Ride on, ride on in majesty (*Together in Song* #348, verses 1, 3, 5)

14. Prayers of the people

By Ellie Mowbray

God,
On this Palm Sunday, we thank you for Jesus Christ,
Who came to show us humility, courage and costly love.
As we ponder who he is – and who he is for us –
Let us open ourselves in new ways
to the transforming power of your Holy Spirit.

We pray for our nation, our leaders and people,
and others all around the world.
May God heal our land and our world – both physically and spiritually.

Loving God, we pray for our doctors, nurses and health workers.
Give them strength and wisdom as they test,
care for and reassure people who are sick and fearful.

We pray for teachers and staff in our schools.
They have the difficult task of teaching – face to face or online –
and reassuring students through this time of anxiety and uncertainty.

We bring before you all whose work and income are uncertain;
those who are homeless and those who care for them.
We pray for the staff, residents and families of those in aged care.
Give them your love, patience and understanding.

Loving God, we pray for our Uniting Church.
Strengthen Reverend Claire as she, the church council and coronavirus team
lead us through this uncertain time.

We bring before you all those from our congregation,
and others that we know, who aren't well.
Loving God, surround them all with your loving arms
and let us be your ears and eyes
so that we can bring your life-giving love and presence.
Help us to respond with compassion to all those around us
who are struggling in this time of uncertainty, anxiety, grief and suffering.

Let us be instruments of your grace:
sowing faith, where there is doubt;
sowing joy where there is sadness;
and bringing hope where there is darkness.

And let us join together in the Lord's Prayer.

**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name;
Your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today your daily bread,
And forgive us our sins,
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
Now and forever.
Amen.**

- 15. Hymn:** This is the day the Lord has made
(*Together in Song* #368, verses 1, 3, 4)

16. Blessing and sending out

This Holy Week, may the coming King find a welcome, and hosannas of hope sound in all the earth! May the presence of Jesus – with us and for us – lift high our hopes, and the hopes of all people, for restoration and resurrection life.

Go then in peace and courage, to ride with him, in loving service to the world he so greatly loves.

And the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, be with you and those whom you love, now and forever more. **Amen.**