

## Christ Church Woodley, Palm Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Good morning. This is a very special time of the year. Next Sunday is Easter – which makes today Palm Sunday. Today we commemorate the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem one week before he was accused, convicted, and executed on a cross. There were huge crowds in Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When the crowd heard that Jesus was on his way, they went out to meet him. Jesus obviously had quite a reputation. It was customary at some Jewish festivals to wave palm branches in the air. This is what they did for Jesus.

Jesus had spent the previous day with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in nearby Bethany. Let me read you what it says in John's Gospel.

<sup>12</sup> *The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.* <sup>13</sup> *So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—  
the King of Israel!'*

<sup>14</sup> *Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:*

<sup>15</sup> *'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.*

*Look, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey's colt!'*

Palm trees don't grow naturally in Woodley, so we can't wave palm branches in our service. But you might have palm crosses. I've got one here. Usually, we would distribute them in church on Palm Sunday and wave them in the air to celebrate Jesus coming to Jerusalem. Ruth told me that she was going to try to deliver palm crosses to some of you. If you've got one, would you like to hold it up in front of you so we can see it. Can we fill our zoom gallery with a forest of palm crosses?

Palm crosses remind us of the whole story of Easter Week – how people acclaimed Jesus as king by waving palm branches. And then, less than a week later, their leaders egged them on to shout 'Crucify him'.

We're now going to sing 264: Make way, make way for Christ the King. The words might fit well in the mouths of the crowds who excitedly welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem. Here was the expected king. If you have a palm cross, maybe you could wave it in front of you at the beginning of each chorus – when we sing 'Make Way'.

### Hymn StF 264 Make way, make way for Christ the King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C33rtm8wmdc>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1 Make way, make way, for Christ the King<br/>in splendour arrives ;<br/>fling wide the gates and welcome him<br/>into your lives.<br/><i>Make way (Make way),<br/>make way (make way),<br/>for the King of kings<br/>(for the King of kings) ;<br/>make way (make way),<br/>make way (make way),<br/>and let his Kingdom in.</i></p> | <p>3 And those who mourn with heavy hearts,<br/>who weep and sigh,<br/>with laughter, joy and royal crown<br/>he'll beautify.</p> |
| <p>2 He comes the broken hearts to heal,<br/>the prisoners to free ;<br/>the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,<br/>the blind shall see.</p>   | <p>4 We call you now to worship him<br/>as Lord of all,<br/>to have no gods before him,<br/>their thrones must fall !</p>         |

Graham Kendrick (b.1950)

## Prayer

Lord, we thank you for all that Palm Sunday stands for. We thank you that you are the king. You are Lord of all things, the Lord of creation – and our Lord as well. We bow before you now. We wait to hear you speak. We wait to feel you touch our hearts and souls.

You are a king of a different kind. A week after Palm Sunday you did what no earthly king would do. You yielded up your life as a servant. You suffered and died on a cross. You did all this that we might find life.

So in humility, we come before you, thanking you for your love and your blessing upon us with your arms stretched out on the cross. We thank you that you forgave those who crucified you - for they knew not what they did. In the same way, you forgive us when we know not what we do, and you go further – you forgive us when we repent of knowingly missing the mark, when we fall short in responding to your call to love. Your generosity and love go far beyond all we might expect. Lord, we come before you now to receive the blessing that you pour out on all people from the cross. Lord, bless us.

**The Lord's Prayer** (said as projected on the screen), or in its traditional form:

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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

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## The King Arrives

If we were together in church, I would ask you whether you had ridden any animals. Anybody enjoy horse-riding? Zoos sometimes let you ride camels or elephants. Anything more exotic? Maybe a camel in Egypt, or an elephant in India? The only animal I have ridden was a donkey – in Skegness on childhood holidays.

Riding animals seems strange now, but go back 2000 years and there were no cars or buses or even trains. Jesus usually walked everywhere – or got in a boat on Lake Galilee. But for the special occasion of entering Jerusalem as the Messiah, Jesus rode on a donkey.

It might seem a strange choice for the entry of a king - like the Queen arriving in a Reliant Robin instead of a Rolls Royce. Or the president of America arriving in a 2-seater propeller plane instead of the mighty Air Force 1 jumbo jet. But no – Jesus was doing what kings did under special circumstances. When ancient kings went to war they rode a horse, ready for battle. But if a king arrived in peace he would ride a donkey. Nobody would go into battle on a donkey – too slow, too small. A donkey symbolised peace.

Also, Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy by the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah prophesied centuries earlier that the Messiah would arrive on a donkey. Jesus was saying – here I am, I'm the Messiah. No wonder the crowds were excited. No wonder the Romans were nervous.

All seemed great for the Jewish nation. The Messiah was here. They waved palm branches, shouted Hosanna, which means save us. The only problem was that Jesus was not the Messiah they expected. He was no hero that would lead them against the Romans. The donkey really did symbolise peace and humility. Unlike other kings of the time, Jesus came not to take the lives of others – but to give his life that others might live.

## Over to the Junior Church for a prayer and their chosen hymn:

### Who put the colours in the rainbow?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPQzzdvwKs8>

Who put the colours in the rainbow?  
 Who put the salt into the sea?  
 Who put the cold in the snowflake?  
 Who made you and me?  
 Who put the hump upon the camel?  
 Who put the neck on the giraffe?  
 Who put the tail upon the monkey?  
 Who made hyenas laugh?  
 Who made whales and snails and quails?  
 Who made hogs and dogs and frogs?  
 Who made bats and rats and cats?  
 Who made everything?

Who put the gold into the sunshine?  
 Who put the sparkle in the stars?  
 Who put the silver in the moonlight?  
 Who made Earth and Mars?  
 Who put the scent into the roses?  
 Who taught the honey bee to dance?  
 Who put the tree inside the acorn?  
 It surely can't be chance!  
 Who made seas and leaves and trees?  
 Who made snow and winds that blow?  
 Who made streams and rivers flow?  
 God made all of these!

## Blessing

### Introduction to the Lent Course Readings

We are now in the sixth week of the Lent Course based on the book 'Saying yes to life' by Ruth Valerio. The book takes us through the first chapter of Genesis, telling the story of the creation in six days. The course emphasises our relationship to the planet – especially how human actions are changing the climate, destroying animal habitats, and harming the poor.

Today we hear what God did on the sixth day, when God created land animals and made humankind in God's own image. Genesis tells us how things began. As the other reading I've chosen part of Isaiah chapter 11. It's familiar as a Christmas reading. It tells about how things will end –

*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together;*

The Isaiah reading also connects with Palm Sunday and the coming of the Messiah. So our readings tell us about the beginning and the end. And here we are in the middle – what does it mean for us now?

### Reading Genesis 1:24-31

<sup>24</sup> And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. <sup>25</sup> God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image,  
 in the image of God he created them;  
 male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

<sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

### Reading Isaiah 11:1-9

<sup>1</sup> A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—

<sup>3</sup> and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;

<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be his belt  
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

<sup>6</sup> The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;  
and a little child will lead them.

<sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the cobra's den,  
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

<sup>9</sup> They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.

### Hymn StF 536 He's got the whole world in his hand <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQgLSZXOa6U>

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|---|---|
| <p>1 He's got the whole world in his hand.<br/>He's got the whole world in his hand.<br/>He's got the whole wide world in his hand.<br/>He's got the whole world in his hand.</p>           | <p>3 He's got you and me, sister, in his hand.<br/>He's got you and me, sister, in his hand.<br/>He's got you and me, sister, in his hand.<br/>He's got the whole world in his hand.</p>    |
| <p>2 He's got you and me, brother, in his hand.<br/>He's got you and me, brother, in his hand.<br/>He's got you and me, brother, in his hand.<br/>He's got the whole world in his hand.</p> | <p>4 He's got the little tiny baby in his hand.<br/>He's got the little tiny baby in his hand.<br/>He's got the little tiny baby in his hand.<br/>He's got the whole world in his hand.</p> |

5 He's got everybody here in his hand.  
 He's got everybody here in his hand.  
 He's got everybody here in his hand.  
 He's got the whole world in his hand.

6 He's got the whole world in his hand.  
 He's got the whole world in his hand.  
 He's got the whole wide world in his hand.  
 He's got the whole world in his hand.

African-American traditional song

## Sermon: The creation as blessing

We've never had pets in our house. We would probably have had a cat but I'm allergic to them. I learnt this when I was a child. We got a cat for my sister, but my eyes started watering and my face went blotchy – and this went away every time I went out the house. So the poor little kitten had to go back where it came from. We did have some pets. My sister had a guinea pig - and we had a tortoise until it ran away and was never seen again.

On the other hand – my Dad kept a few chickens. We ate their eggs - and then the chickens were there no more – maybe ending up on the dinner table – I don't know and I wasn't told.

As human beings we have a strange relationship with animals. Some animals are close companions - and others we cook and eat.

The reading we heard from Isaiah describes the ideal state of creation when all is fulfilled:

*The wolf will live with the lamb,  
 the leopard will lie down with the goat...  
 7 The cow will feed with the bear,  
 their young will lie down together,  
 and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

The reading from Genesis also has vegetarian tendencies. God said to men and women:

*"I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."*

But God does not say this about the animals. Instead, the animals are partners with us in sharing the plants as food, saying,

*"And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food."*

The impulses of creation and its final fulfilment are vegetarian. However, there's no indication that Jesus was a vegetarian. There's no record of Jesus objecting to temple sacrifices – only that he objected to the way the sacrifices were paid for.

Creation is in a strange in-between state between what is and what might be, between reality and a visionary ideal.

Anybody who has watched Jurassic Park and its sequels will know the capacity of nature to be red in tooth and claw. The dinosaurs dominated this planet for more than 100 million years – far longer than humans have lived.

Yet along comes humankind in its puny physical body talking about love and compassion, creating things of beauty, and able to measure the age of the universe. We are the strangest of all creatures – at least thus far in time and in this corner of the universe. We are made of the same atomic elements as the rest of universe and governed by the same laws of physics. Our birth is the outworking of millennia of evolution, and we die when our bodies fail. Yet we have the capacity for something much greater.

How strange it is that the universe gave rise to humankind. If you look at all the possible forms the universe might take, we have no right to be here. If you pick a possible universe at random, the likelihood of it producing us is practically zero. I'm not offering this as an argument from design that God exists. Logic does not stretch that far. But it does push us into thinking about who we are and how we should choose to be in this world. The answer we find in Genesis make a lot of sense.

Genesis chapter 1 was written with no knowledge of evolution, but it was written by people who experienced life in a similar way to ourselves. Creation in six days is mythical but it presents us with truths that are relevant now. We can take a message from these verses about who we are and about our relationship to the world.

In Genesis we read that God said,

*"let us make humankind in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish on the sea and birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals."*

We are to rule, but ruling in the same manner as God, in God's likeness, for the benefit of creation, ruling in love and delighting in creation's goodness. We are called to be God's agents in the world.

God created the world as an act of blessing. The fifth day ends with God blessing the creatures of sea and air. In the sixth day, God blesses humankind. And creation is complete on the seventh day when God blesses the seventh day and makes it holy. In each day of creation, God pronounced a blessing when God saw that what God had made was good and very good.

As human beings we have a two-way role – looking in two directions. We are called to receive God's blessing and to join God in blessing creation.

Looking back, I think I probably missed out by not having pets as a child. Pets are an opportunity to bless and to be blessed. Next door had a white cat, inappropriately called Sooty. Stroking Sooty was a blessing to me. And judging from Sooty's purring it was also a blessing to Sooty. So whenever you stroke your cat or take the dog for a walk, or hear a lark singing or enjoy the beauty of sea or sky, seeing that it is good, you're participating in God's act of blessing creation.

Some forms of Christian religion are punitive and vengeful - behave yourself or eternal punishment will come your way – and be sure to repent when you sin. Repentance is good, but its aim is restoration to a relationship of love with God, with others and with ourselves. Think of the parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal son got it all wrong and returned home in repentance. The son's father was not recriminating. The father blessed his wayward son by throwing his arms around him and ordering a feast of celebration. Blessing is good. In acts of blessing, we contribute positively to God's creative activity.

Our reading from Isaiah is usually taken as a prophecy of the Messiah. It's often read in the carol service. The coming Messiah would lead creation into a state of blessedness in which

*the wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat...*

If we are to follow Jesus, our lives should be a blessing to others, to the animal kingdom, and to the planet on which we live. For this we were created.

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Genesis 1 tells us how things were created. Isaiah 11 is a vision of how things will be. Our next hymn is about how things are now – what we have done and what we must do.

## Hymn StF 693 Beauty for brokenness <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbtN4vyPBxU>

- 1 Beauty for brokenness,  
hope for despair,  
Lord, in your suffering world  
this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children,  
justice, joy, peace,  
sunrise to sunset,  
your kingdom increase !
- 2 Shelter for fragile lives,  
cures for their ills,  
work for all people,  
trade for their skills ;  
land for the dispossessed,  
rights for the weak,  
voices to plead the cause  
of those who can't speak.
- 3 Refuge from cruel wars,  
havens from fear,  
cities for sanctuary,  
freedoms to share.  
Peace to the killing-fields,  
scorched earth to green,  
Christ for the bitterness,  
his cross for the pain.
- 4 Rest for the ravaged earth,  
oceans and streams  
plundered and poisoned —  
our future, our dreams.  
Lord, end our madness,  
carelessness, greed ;  
make us content with  
the things that we need.

*God of the poor,  
friend of the weak,  
give us compassion we pray :  
melt our cold hearts,  
let tears fall like rain ;  
come, change our love  
from a spark to a flame.*

*Refrain*

- 5 Lighten our darkness,  
breathe on this flame  
until your justice burns  
brightly again ;  
until the nations  
learn of your ways,  
seek your salvation  
and bring you their praise.

*Refrain*

Graham Kendrick

## Intercessions for Palm Sunday led by Ruth Taylor

Father, we pray for your creation. You gave us responsibility for all that you have made. You entrusted every living creature into our care.

We acknowledge that we have betrayed that trust and neglected our responsibility. We have allowed your good earth to become polluted by our greed, damaged by our selfishness and sucked dry by our materialism.

Father, by your Holy Spirit, give us a renewed urgency to fulfil the task you laid upon us.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Father, we pray for governments around the world; for those whose decisions will affect the whole of your creation; for those who ignore the implications for future generations of the decisions they are making today.

Father, we pray for the leaders who are genuinely seeking to behave responsibly to act justly and be faithful stewards of your creation.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Father, we pray for any who are finding that the pressures and stress they face each day mean that their joy in living in your world is being drained away.

Father we give thanks for those who use their skill of writing, singing, painting or performing to draw others closer to you; for scientists whose discoveries provide us with even more reasons to worship you.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Father, we pray for ordinary men and women; for those with whom we work and those with whom we share our lives.

Father, we pray for those who find their work a toil, their employment a burden and their horizon bounded only by time and space.

Give them a renewed energy to accept what cannot be changed and a vision to see past the ordinary daily routine to a place where you are waiting to show them that a life lived with you is a life changer.

Father, we pray for those whose lives are dominated by material things and by the pleasures of the moment, that there is no space for the things of heaven or the Lord of eternity. May they take the time to find you and all that you can give them.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Father we pray for ourselves. We too are your creation. We acknowledge that we are wonderfully made and capable of great acts of kindness, love and understanding. We acknowledge that we too need your healing, forgiving and transforming grace.

Father, touch our hearts with your love, our lives with your grace and our lips with your truth. Help us to find renewed meaning to our lives as we reflect again on what it cost you to save us.

Father, enable us to live that others may live in you.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Now we will remember people known to us who are in need of your help today.

(Opportunity for others to name those people and situations known to them)

We also remember those of our church family who are unable to join us in this time of worship.

We remember:        Jo McElveen                Mary Varndell                Rosemary Woodman

Margery Sargent     Janet Morris                Douglas Rippon                Beryl Langton

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

We ask all these spoken prayers and those in our hearts in the name of the one who gave us this world, His son Jesus and the Holy Spirit who remains with us always.

*Amen*

## Hymn StF 328 Jesus shall reign [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcxdvJy\\_t\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcxdvJy_t_8)

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|--|--|
| <p>1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun<br/>does his successive journeys run ;<br/>his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,<br/>till moons shall wax and wane no more.</p> | <p>4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns ;<br/>the prisoner leaps to lose his chains ;<br/>the weary find eternal rest,<br/>and all who are in want are blest.</p> |
| <p>2 For him shall endless prayer be made,<br/>and praises throng to crown his head ;<br/>his name like sweet perfume shall rise<br/>with every morning sacrifice.</p>     | <p>5 Let every creature rise and bring<br/>its grateful honours to our King ;<br/>angels descend with songs again,<br/>and earth repeat the loud amen.</p>         |
| <p>3 People and realms of every tongue<br/>dwell on his love with sweetest song ;<br/>and infant voices shall proclaim<br/>their early blessings on his name.</p>          | <p>Isaac Watts (1674–1748)</p>   |

### From Psalm 115

The Lord remembers us and blesses us.  
He will bless his people Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron.  
He will bless those who fear the Lord – small and great alike.  
May the Lord cause you to flourish, both you and your children.  
May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and Earth.

And the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit –  
be with each one of us now and always.

*Amen*