

## **Palm Sunday Reflection (05.04.2020) by Bill Pattinson**

### **Matthew 21:1-11; Dramatic Reading of the Passion according to Matthew**

#### **Prayer**

(Holding Palm Cross)

Each Palm Sunday as we enter our churches we are given a Palm Cross. At the beginning of the service we hold up our Palm crosses to be blessed. Then joyfully we may process around the church holding our crosses high singing “All glory, laud and honour” or perhaps “Ride on, ride on in majesty.” We may even go out into the streets singing our praises. I well remember one Palm Sunday processing all the way down to St Michael’s to join our friends there. This year of 2020 it is totally different. No Palm crosses, no procession. Our church buildings are locked and empty; our car-less roads and quiet streets are almost silent. For fear of being struck down by a virus we are self-distancing, self-isolating, in partial lockdown or even in complete quarantine.

The Palm and the Cross symbolising life and death. On that first Palm Sunday Jesus rode into Jerusalem to be greeted by a crowd full of life, throwing their cloaks on the ground in front of him, cutting down palm branches to place amongst them. Here was a man of great importance, a prophet even. “Hosanna to the Son of David” shouted the crowd racing in front of him - it was as if the stones of the streets themselves were shouting out. Here was the King who would set his people free, free from Roman occupation, free from paying taxes, free to live life as they wished. Yet Jesus knew this was not the reason for his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. He was in Jerusalem for an entirely different journey, which just five days later would lead to the cross, to his crucifixion and his death.

So perhaps this coming Holy Week as we follow Jesus to the events of his Last Supper, through his agony and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, to his mocking and humiliation; as we follow his staggering legs up the hill of Golgotha and witness the pain and horror of his crucifixion we will see our Lord's road to the cross with different eyes. We too may be nearing our Good Friday in our concern of being arrested by a virus, in the restrictions of our own isolated lives, in our anxieties for our own and loved ones' safety, in our horrors of the statistics of those with the disease and those dying, in our disbelief of a global lockdown of life in a pandemic of Biblical proportions. But there is hope; there is good news for our Lord's Good Friday was followed by Easter Sunday and his resurrection.

In this darkness of our lives so many lights of Christ are shining; so many beauties of God's world are given a different meaning. As I look out of my study window to the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin here in Silverton, the primroses have never seemed so yellow among the gravestones. Spring this year appears much more verdant, the daffodils and tulips much more colourful. In that strange eerie silence we hear the bird songs so clearly as if for the first time. There seems to be a new recognition of value and worth for those who often work for the smallest wages - for all those who cannot work at home. Social media reports of so many hosannas - the paramedic applauded by the whole of her street as she went off to work; the joy of organised social distance dancing at 11o'clock each morning and seemingly the whole country coming out to applaud the NHS workers one evening at 8 o'clock. In the midst of death and destruction, it seems we have never been more alive. The love Christ showed in his crucifixion is being also shown in the actions of so many - their sacrifice will shine for many years! Hosanna! And there will be an Easter to this crisis, a resurrection which we shall surely celebrate.

What seems many Palm Sundays ago, this cross I hold we used during our time of prayer. We were asked to write the word “courage” along the crossbeam and above and below it two thoughts for prayer. The crosses were brought to the altar and blessed. At the end of the service we took someone else’s cross home. As well as courage, much needed at the moment, family, poverty and inequality have been added to this cross. Still so appropriate. Peter Atkinson, the Dean of Worcester, suggests in his Palm Sunday reflection, we can make our own palms. It doesn’t need to be worked into a cross - just a piece of greenery, some foliage, something from your garden. He suggests we use that Palm to remind us daily of Jesus, our Christ and King. I suggest that after we have lit our candles at seven this Palm Sunday, we go out into our streets with our homemade Palms and shout “Hosanna” for all those working to save lives and all those keeping our lives going. Surely in their love and commitment, there is Christ. Hosanna!

Bill Pattinson

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