

Homily for Palm Sunday morning prayer – 5th April 2020

My brothers and sisters in these very unprecedented times, I speak to you from my home in Mitcham with thanks to my daughter who have enabled me to use modern technology to reach you all. On this palm Sunday, churches all around the world like ours are in a lockdown due to coronavirus, an invisible enemy that has come to infest us. Where we can only go out to buy food and medicine or exercise once a day, the most vulnerable cannot even go out to do the essentials for their own safety and wellbeing.

As our normal practice, today Palm Sunday, a very joyous day in the Christian calendar, we would have gathered outside Centre court in the centre of Wimbledon joining with other local churches to worship as we recollect the triumphant entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The people threw palm branches on the way, singing praises to God and saying **“Praise to David’s Son: God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise Him”**. We would have been singing a number of hymns as we process back to Holy Trinity church or from Christ church to St Johns church, offering people we meet palm crosses.

But today our reality is different because we are all at home unable to go to church due to the lockdown imposed by the government to contain the spread of coronavirus. Some of us have joined in for this service at home and others may listen to it later, whatever you are doing this Palm Sunday I pray for God’s reassurance that he is with us in our suffering and worry and that our hope is founded in Him, it is not futile hope, because God keeps his promises. He said to us that he will be with us always, that is in good times and bad times and right now we are experiencing very bad times. Our part is to keep the faith in the knowledge that Christ is with us as we recollect his triumphant entry into Jerusalem this morning in our homes. Our hope is founded in the Lord who triumphs over sickness and decease, we will be made whole again as we acknowledge the Living God, who alone brings healing and reconciliation to His church and the world. Therefore we are assured of God’s care and love as we celebrate this Palm Sunday and that with God all is well.

Matthew’s gospel mentioned a donkey and a colt whilst the other gospels records a colt only. This was the same event, but Matthew focuses on the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 where a donkey and a colt was mentioned, **“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.”** Jesus’ actions, by sending his two disciples to the village ahead of Him where they will find a donkey tied with his colt fulfilled the prophet’s words, thus giving another indication that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. And when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt he confirmed his kingship as well as his humility. Here he was the King of Kings, entering Jerusalem humbly riding on a donkey’s colt, contrast that with the power brokers of today where their entrances to places is announced by police outriders, sirens and followed by a red carpet. Instead Jesus was welcomed by a crowd who sang royals songs or chants, they threw their cloaks and palm fronts on the way, welcoming him as son of David, everyone wanted him to be the sort of king that will remove them from the oppressive Roman government they are under and exploitation, but this same crowd in a couple of days will turn against him bowing to political pressures. How is it for us, in our present circumstance

what kind of king will we want Jesus to be, will it be the one who will bring to an end coronavirus and its effect in the world or perhaps the most common prayer of all – Help.

Jesus intends to answer all our prayers but in his own way, he does not wait for our motives to be pure or for us to have sorted out our lives to the point where we can look him in the face. Just like the people in the crowd who wanted rescue from oppressive Roman rule, exploitation by the rich and so for us from the fear of coronavirus and the pain of illness and death its causing amongst us. Jesus says yes to theirs and our desires at the deepest level, he will have to say no or wait to the desires that are conscious or expressed.

As we sit and wait in our homes on this palm Sunday, may the recollection of Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem bring hope to us and that as we say Hosanna that it is the moment salvation is dawning on us and it is a step towards wisdom and humility and the beginning of genuine Christian faith.

Today as always may we pray for one another, our families and friends, for our neighbours far and near especially as we begin Holy week and Easter in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

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