

## **Palm Sunday Service**

### **Sermon by Janice Atfield**

#### **A Prayer Of Adoration**

Father, enshrined in mystery, we adore you.

Closing our eyes, we seek you within,  
and praise you for meeting us there.

Son, riding on a colt, we adore you.

We praise you for your generous love, one with us.

Holy Spirit, guiding and inspiring us, we adore you.

Through you we praise the mystery and the majesty  
that manifested in frail flesh, yet overcame it.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in adoration we celebrate your victory. Amen.

#### **A Prayer of Confession**

Eager to emulate that first Palm Sunday crowd, we picture ourselves casting our cloaks before Jesus and joining the celebration. Would we, though, if it were to happen again today? An impoverished preacher on the humblest of beasts – would we cast our finest before him? Tear off our wool and cashmere coats, our leather jackets, and throw them down for his donkey to trample?

We confess, Lord, that we would probably be loath to leave our homes.

We confess that we are carried away by stories and the seeming romance of them.

Those people threw their prized possessions before Jesus, giving the best they had.

Forgive us for holding back so much from him, and help us to celebrate with all that we have. Amen.

#### **Assurance of Forgiveness**

Lord, thank you for forgiving us when we have been mean with our attitudes.

Jesus forgives us and opens our hearts and our minds to how we should think and feel.

Lord, thank you for forgiving us when we have withheld our possessions.

Jesus, who had nothing, forgives us and shows us how to share.

Lord, thank you for forgiving us when we have kept ourselves to ourselves.

Jesus, who lived and died for others, forgives us and calls us to join him. Amen.

**Reading:** Mark 11 : 1-11

## Sermon

I told you on a previous occasion about the times when my Nanna would come and stay with us from Barrow, but that is only half the story because every school holiday we would go and stay with her.

We would leave home as soon as school had finished so that we could get through Preston before the workers at English Electric clocked off and came pouring through the streets on their bikes. In those days the only way north was through the city centre.

Once through Preston Dad would get out of the car to check the engine: we had a little pea green Ford Prefect PFY 79 and it found long journeys difficult. It would take about 3 hours to get from Churchtown to Barrow with a fair wind behind us.

There were certain landmarks that we would look for to gauge how far we were along the journey; Whitbarrow Scar Backbarrow Dolly Blue works, Ulverston Hoad and finally The Friary fish and chip shop where we would buy our tea before we turned the corner into Bridgegate Avenue where Nanna lived.

But the main punctuating event of the drive was the onset of my sister's travel sickness – as soon as we left the M6 and joined the winding roads leading to the South Lakes. I used to look forward to it because this was the only time that we ever had Lucozade as it was considered to help with travel sickness, so we would both have a drink and I would be given the yellow cellophane from round the neck of the bottle to look through and contemplate a world under a lime green sky.

Journeying: a metaphor for life of course; maybe these days even a cliché as everyone seems to be on some kind of journey, but it is woefully and disappointingly easy to believe that we are on the Christian journey, when in fact, we are merely watching the parade go by caught up in the moment, like the people who lined the road to Jerusalem to see Jesus ride past on a donkey; but they stayed where they were – they didn't follow him and were left with the abandoned fluttering sandwich wrappers and the empty drinking vessels rattling down the stony hill. What was that all about? It seemed so real at the time!

Only those who JOURNEY with Jesus gain enlightenment – those who merely stand and watch remain observers. This was realised at the very beginning of the Christian faith, reflected in the name given to it; THE WAY, and the Passion narrative is quite explicit and emphatic that we must walk with Jesus if we are to witness the redemptive power of God and the transformation of the human heart.

We begin with the Transfiguration – toiling up the mountain side with Peter, James and John to share in their astonishment. We must then journey into the desert with Jesus to

witness the temptations and His resolution of them. WE must accompany Him to Jerusalem and walk alongside the donkey as it takes Him through the excited crowds. Soon we will go with Him to Gethsemane, trail behind the temple guard as they haul Him off to a kangaroo court and tread the Via Dolorosa , the way of grief, to the foot of the cross.

The cross, of course, is a gateway to the continuing journey – to the empty tomb, to the Emmaus road and on to the dazzling mysterious trail of the risen Christ as He walks into eternity.

But this morning, let us do as we are bidden by the liturgy of Holy Week and travel with Jesus who is riding a donkey into Jerusalem. In doing so, we leave the crowds behind and walk beside Jesus as He enters the temple.

In Matthew and Luke's gospels this is when the cleansing of the temple takes place as Jesus finds it full of stall holders and money changers – both humans and animals alike making a mess and a racket totally out of keeping with the ethos of this Holy place – the House of God. The only difference between the crowds outside and those within is intent.

But in Marks gospel there is no suggestion of this; in fact there is an implicit sense of quietness and calm. We get the impression that Jesus has the temple to Himself, or almost, because WE who have faithfully followed are by His side seeing what He sees, experiencing that sudden closing down of noise and din that we have known when setting foot inside a silent Church from the busy street outside.

We too can watch the hot dust swirling in the shafts of late evening sunlight, the leaves blown in through the open door skittering at our feet. And we can watch the serenity fall upon the face of the one who knows that He has come home, and whatever He sees that is beyond the power of human vision and is veiled from our mortal understanding, it nerves Him for what is to come and He goes out to be with His friends in Bethany.

And so it can be that the pauses along the way that we walk with Jesus are where we are blessed with enlightenment. The liturgy of the Christian year offers such pauses, like stepping stones that we have to tread with care and concentration across the stream of faith; we must take things slowly and watch where we place our feet.

Advent and Lent are the 2 most well known but there are others, collectively known as the Holy mysteries. But above all, in our everyday lives in means pausing to read the Scriptures thoughtfully, spending time in silence before the ultimate presence and having the stillness of mind to recognise the needs and joys of those around us and the magnificence of the universe in which we live.

By these means we are given the strength and enthusiasm to walk with Jesus and when we do, this is God's promise to us spoken through the prophet Isaiah; "Your eyes shall see your teacher and when you turn to the left or the right, your ears shall hear a word behind you saying THIS is the way; walk in it."

### **Prayers of intercession**

Praise the Lord: **Hosanna.**

We praise and thank you for the progress that has been made in the Covid vaccination programme, and we pray for those in our health services who have been put under additional pressure as a result of the pandemic; for those preparing for a third wave; and those working in care homes.

Praise the Lord: **Hosanna.**

We praise and thank you for the churches that have been able to reopen for worship, and for creative ways which have been found to unite people in prayer and worship. We pray for those who feel isolated; who long to gather with others; who cannot access online worship.

Praise the Lord: **Hosanna.**

We praise and thank you for signs of spring; for crocuses and daffodils, and all the green shoots of growth.

We pray for gardeners; for those who look after parks and public verges; for those who keep our streets clean and make our communities more pleasant.

Praise the Lord: **Hosanna.**

We praise and thank you for the message of hope, encouragement and peace that Jesus brings. We pray for those who are fearful for the future, those who have lost direction in life and those whose lives are troubled. We especially pray for...

Praise the Lord: **Hosanna.**

Lord Jesus, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord –  
blessed for all you are; blessed for all you do.

Receive our prayers and speak to the needs of all your children, we pray. **Amen.**

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