

## Sermon for Palm Sunday 2021

The Gospel Reading John Chapter 12 verses 12-20

In Bethany, Lazarus has been raised from the dead having responded to Jesus' command. With his disciples (and others) Jesus turns towards Jerusalem. They are met by a multitude who have heard about Lazarus. They carry palm branches. They shout "Hosanna to the Son of David". Jesus finds a young donkey, sits upon it and rides into Jerusalem, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy.

His disciples did not understand until AFTERWARDS, after Jesus had been glorified. The Pharisees say "The whole world has gone after him!" And they plot his death.

This first Palm Sunday remains so important to the Church as the prelude to Holy Week and Easter. Congregations still join in processions, bearing palms and palm crosses, singing their Hosannas, often accompanied by a donkey. This all adds to the memory of that first spectacle in our time of AFTERWARDS-after Jesus had been betrayed, judged, crucified, buried and raised from the dead, to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords to the glory of God his Father. Through this memory and celebration, we are all reminded how fickle our humanity is; how easy it is to go along with the crowd when our expectations are not fulfilled, to side with our own interests when it suits us. This is how WE can identify with that crowd and mourn our decision. This is how we can learn the need for repentance when denying our Lord in so many ways.

Palm Sunday processions in these "modern" times (reflecting the numbers of the would-be faithful) are often a pale shadow of what they used to be. Sometimes, we do get an idea from how Christians on the continent still celebrate their festivals. Make no mistake, Palm Sunday (whenever) is a festival. And so, we sing

"Gloria, laus et honour tibi sit, rex Christe redemptor"

Better known as

"All glory, laud and honour to thee Redeemer King".

This hymn was originally written in the Early Middle Ages (which is why I've reminded some of us of the Latin). All of it reminds us very accurately of the Gospel record. By singing it, we remember. And we shall sing it again, one day.

There's a story associated with the original hymn. Have you ever heard of St. Theodulph of Orleans? Come on! Be honest! My comprehensive book about saints is not sufficiently comprehensive. Theodulph doesn't get a mention. But The Penguin Book of Hymns does tell his story. After having been consecrated Bishop, Theodulph retained his position for 30 years before falling foul of King Louis the First and being thrown into prison in Angers. It was here that he wrote this most famous hymn in a more than comprehensive way than we are familiar with- all 39 verses of it! It was intended to be sung in a long procession-a very, very long procession. What a sound the multitude would have made.

Legend has it that, as King Louis passed by the prison on Palm Sunday of 821, he was so moved, that he ordered its author to be released. I can find no record of all the 39 verses, but certainly the King heard the praise to his

Redeemer King,

to Israel's Monarch,

to the Glorious Offspring of David,

to the merciful King,

to the kind King,

to the conquering King.

Perhaps, Louis thought the prisoner was singing to him! How easy it is to be confused when given a title. How easy it is to misunderstand. (Go to [Confused.com](http://Confused.com))

But be not confused about this thought. Theodulph lived for only one year after he was released. I imagine it had a different sense than before his imprisonment. He had learned through his meditations (required to write such a hymn) to sing "Hosanna to the One who saves- who saved, will save and is saving-STILL- you and I and the whole world.

The crowd on that first Palm Sunday ( in their cheering, in adoration, praise and joy that Jesus had arrived as the only one who had raised Lazarus from the dead) were also praying "Hosanna-please save us".

What did they know they had to be saved from? What do we??

In our city, in our team and in some places in our Diocese and throughout the land, this is how we have celebrated Palm Sunday for many years, the hymn reduced to a few verses (usually 5) and a few modifications. And we will again ! One year, the procession (led by the crucifer and candlebearers-candles kept blowing out) left All Saints, taking a route out of the north door, turning right( where the donkey was waiting) followed by the congregation waving their palms crosses, continuing around High Town and, finally, re-entering the church by the south door, still singing "to thee Redeemer King" (probably for the third time) to join with the organ-just!

I've elaborated on this simply because, on that occasion, unusually, there were many more people than normal, with coffee cups in hand, waiting for Marks and Spencers to open.

They took up with other words more associated with a procession and a donkey. "Away in a manger" clashed with "All glory, laud and honour" producing a confused, cacophonous sound. Here was a multitude making their contribution about a completely other time. As we walked forward, Jesus' birth was being overwhelmed by the foreshadowing of his death. Had no one taught them? Still, His Messiahship was proclaimed and misunderstood on both occasions.

It is most likely that the crowd on that first occasion did misunderstand. Certainly, the disciples did until AFTERWARDS. Jesus was not to be a political Messiah, wielding political power, as people thought on that day. Had they really thought what the donkey stood for, they would have known. He was (is) to be a Messiah whose kingship is not of this world.

So, on Palm Sunday, He rides on to die, his sovereignty defined by Calvary and confirmed through his resurrection. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who washes feet and loves to the end.- even those Pharisees who plotted against him and had their way, for the time being, still exerting their power, the power of this world.

That story will be told in its entirety this afternoon (also according to custom) but on Zoom. Remember, that we re-hear it in that time of AFTERWARDS knowing that he journeys with us in all our misunderstandings, carrying all our burdens (like the donkey he first rode in on to Bethlehem and Jerusalem) riding into his kingdom yet-to-come to save the world.

Never be confused about that as it is the way to a newfound freedom, experienced in this world and the next as we follow his command to love in all patience and humility, just as he loved Lazarus that we might all be partakers of his resurrection.

Revd Chris Fletcher

## Some intercessions for Palm Sunday

### The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,  
who in your tender love towards the human race  
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
to take upon him our flesh  
and to suffer death upon the cross:  
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,  
and also be partakers of his resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen

Hosanna to the Son of David.....

Forgive us for the many times we have denied Jesus.....

We pray for Christian people everywhere, suffering with them in our disunity....

We pray for the lawmakers, that our common life may be ordered in justice and mercy...

We pray for those who live in all kinds of darkness, in isolation, in bereavement, for those weighed down with hardship and failure, tempted to give up.....

We pray for all those who have died.....

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord  
Hosanna in the highest

Holy God, holy and strong,  
holy and immortal, have mercy upon us