

PALM SUNDAY

28/3/21

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus, God's Chosen One, is here! Encourager of the weak, opponent of evil, advocate for justice.

"Hosanna!"

Jesus, God's Chosen One, is here! Promised by the prophets, friend of the poor, teacher of the disciples.

"All blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Jesus, God's Chosen One, is here! Son of Joseph and Mary, peace-creator for Zacchaeus, God's Love in action.

"Hosanna in highest heaven!"

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal God, your love is with us as we celebrate the coming of Jesus into Jerusalem:

crowds cheering, palms waving, the disciples enthusiastic.

Your love stays with us as we slink away afraid,

when the cheering is silenced, when the palms are trampled, and when the sound of nailing is heard.

Your love becomes a personal love, a love for our faith community,

as bread is broken, wine is poured out, and Jesus is graciously remembered. On this glorious, painful day, fill us with your love! Amen.

HYMN 333 All glory praise and honour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9VnLNh5YY8>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Blessed are you, O Lord,

who comes in peace.

We give thanks for your love

that would not falter, not even in the end.

To love with such clarity and so unreservedly-

we can scarcely imagine.

May our own love mirrors yours

now and always.

Gracious God,

in this time of confession,

we offer to you the fullness of our lives.

We all have failings and things we would rather weren't a part of our story.

Be with us when we stumble and help us stand up once more.

As we remember Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem,

we may find ourselves there in the crowd,

shouting Hosannas and singing your praises.

May these Hosannas come from our hearts

knowing what is to come of Jesus.

Help us not to shy away from the truth of Christ's giving.

We too may find ourselves amongst those who will shout crucify;

Love is sometimes too hard to face.

Be with us as we journey towards the cross

that we might enter into this mystery

with our whole lives

and be recipients of your amazing love.

Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God is abounding in steadfast love.

Even when we fail, God's love is never ending.

In Christ, you are forgiven.

In Christ, you are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

READINGS

- **Mark 11:1-11**

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 2 and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. 3 If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" 4 They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5 some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6 They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 9 Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

11 Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

HYMN 348 Ride on, ride on in majesty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAh1IzSQ3P4>

SERMON

I was looking back at what was happening this time last year. We were in lockdown. We were just getting over the summer of bush fires and praying for rain. Doesn't a year make a difference?

What was foremost in our minds then is virtually forgotten now. We have moved from drought and fire through COVID to flooding rains. Now things have almost returned to the new normal as we are able to gather at weddings and funerals and sing openly in church.

Over the last few weeks we have had many headlines in the news about how women are treated in our national parliament and then how society is rejecting the past pattern of how we have treated treatment women as second class citizens. As times change our emphasis changes too. What is jumping from the headlines one day seems to be completely forgotten the next week.

One comment which sticks in my mind is that “today's rooster is tomorrow's feather duster.” Our attention span can be very short, especially when it is governed by ratings driven TV news. What was once sensational all too quickly is forgotten.

What were the main headlines three weeks ago? Can anyone recall?

Today we come to the culmination of the Lenten journey. It is marked by Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Jesus was very popular and leading a growing crowd of followers into a city already packed with pilgrims.

However, as I mentioned before, public opinions can change very quickly, almost overnight. There has been massive attention in the media in the last few weeks as the AFL and NRL footy seasons start with crowds of spectators. Teams which were announced as the next premiers by the media experts have been trounced by other teams who were given no hope just a few weeks ago.

On that Palm Sunday Jesus was the popular head of the latest bandwagon. The excitement has been slowly building around this charismatic rabbi as he moved through the Judean countryside over the last few weeks. Now the caravan has reached Jerusalem. It is the final destination for the journey and Jesus was well aware of what lay ahead of him, even if no one else realised.

With its temple Jerusalem was the centre of the Jewish religion at that time and thousands upon thousands of people from all over the known world gravitated there yearly for this massive annual event. In Jewish theology and culture it was believed that this was the place that the long awaited Messiah would rise up to lead the nation to world domination.

While there is no mention of Jesus having made any such claims, the hopes and the rumours were certainly circulating. This popularity also meant that Jesus was starting to gather opponents who wished him harm, especially among the Jewish 'Priestly Club' who would have felt threatened by his teachings.

As he rode triumphantly down the narrow streets everyone there seemed to want to jump onto the bandwagon. The palms were waving and lining the road. There were people calling out joyously from the side of the road. There were garments covering the road stopping him from being messed up by the mud and dirty water which would have been inevitable in a town without sewerage.

There was singing and dancing as part of this celebration. Shouts of Jesus and Hosanna! This was an event to be seen. Very few people could draw such a massive and jubilant crowd. People would have been drawn to the celebration by the sheer noise and vibe which was emanating from this figure riding down the street on a donkey.

But we know only too well that popularity can be a fleeting experience. In just a few days the same crowds would be bellowing 'crucify Him.'

How could things change and shatter so quickly?

The toast of the town one day, worthless garbage only a few days later.

Why would he be cast aside so easily?

There have been eminent theologians and experts over the intervening years who have tried to contemplate the failed relationships here. Those people calling out hosanna had their own ideas of what should have happened. They wanted a certain type of political and militaristic Messiah and nothing less.

We could get into the studies of crowd behaviours and manipulating public opinions. Then there is the mob mentality which I have seen on TV in the last few days with riots in the USA over their celebration of what is called 'Spring Break' and the violent response in one English town against increasing police powers to control demonstrations. Violent disruptions of every-day life still occur day after day over what other people might perceive to be minor disagreements.

In retrospect I don't think that a detailed analysis is warranted. If we are honest with ourselves then we would soon be shown up by our own actions. We might seem to be loving and caring but we can switch. We might sing loving praises one day but then walk to the other side of the road to avoid that person laying in the gutter the next day.

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HYMN 244 Trotting, trotting, trotting

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

O Great God,

you weave your blessings into our lives.

Take these gifts that we offer;

may they be a blessing to others.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Loving God,

our world cries out in pain and suffering.

Be with us in our need

and offer comfort in our distress.

We pray for our world.

So many people cry out for justice

and hope for a better tomorrow.

As we hear their cries,

embolden us to be the change we wish to see.

Give us strength and grace along the journey.

We pray for the church.

We have not always acted for peace

and healing in the world.

Help us to mend our ways

that we might be your hands and feet,

offering light in dark places.

We pray for our communities.

Sometimes people feel alone in crowded rooms –

sometimes people feel crowded even when they are alone.

Help us to build communities

that draw the embracing circle wider

that we can encompass all your children.

As we move into Holy Week,

draw near to us

that even through pain and suffering

we might see you with us.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 547 Be thou my vision

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

BENEDICTION

We have come to shout Hosanna and sing praise to God.

We now go out – knowing that the horizon is dark.

May we be sustained in these moments

and celebrate life's journey.

God goes with us, even in the darkness.

Go in peace, Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJ6RaKX4_I4