

Palm Sunday Service of worship, 28th March 2021, LEURA UNITING CHURCH

(Prepared by Mark Hillis)

CALL TO WORSHIP

(Adapted from Amelia Koh-Butler, "Songline" 2017)

From river to ocean, mountain to plain, campfire to hearth
May the First People, Dharug and Gundungurra
who have cared for this land, be blessed.

From breath to song, from step to dance
May those who follow your Songlines
guide us on the journey of living honourably in this place,
Learning to respect Aboriginal heritage.

From greeting to Amen, from silence to chorus
May our worship join with the voices
of the First Peoples of this land: past, present and emerging.



Our mob, God's story
Max Conlon

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Hymn 276 *There's a light upon the mountains* (Words available on Hymn Sheet)

PRAYER OF ADORATION, CONFESSION & THANKSGIVING

(Adapted from Psalm 118:1-4)

O give thanks to the LORD, who is so good;
whose steadfast love endures forever!
Let the tribes of Israel and Judah say,
"God's steadfast love endures forever."
Let the people of all nations say,
"God's steadfast love endures forever."
Let us who gather here in Epping say,
"God's steadfast love endures forever."



Ever-living, ever-loving God, it is a challenge for us who feel so constrained, so limited by our weaknesses, needs and faults. We do not always sense the everlasting and eternal loving attributes which we believe about you. Does that make us contrary beings? Perhaps that is too easy to say. We have an ability to look and to see beyond ourselves. We know that an extraordinarily, stupendously majestic universe stretches way beyond anything we can invent or imagine. And you are beyond our imagining. But Jesus is not. We thank you that Jesus revealed something about your presence in life which we have partially discerned. His goodness encourages the good in ourselves. His temptations reveal the weaknesses we possess, yet also our desire to improve. Ever-loving God revealed in Jesus, we seek your life in the midst of our own. Even as we pray for forgiveness of wrong in our lives and seek to forgive those who do wrong against us, we pray for that steadfast, enduring love for which we give thanks! *We continue to pray in the words of the psalmist [Psalm 118: 5-9 & 20-26]:*

Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.
With the LORD on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me?

The LORD is on my side to help me; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in mortals.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in those who hold positions of power.

This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.
I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

**The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.**

This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!

O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Give thanks to God, who is goodness itself;

Give praise to God whose love never ends;

Trust in the Lord, you are forgiven!

Blessed be God forever. AMEN.

SHARING THE PEACE (IN A COVID-safe WAY)

SCRIPTURE (Lorraine & Stephen White)

Philippians 2: 5 – 11

READER: Your word is a lamp to my feet

RESPONSE: **and a light for my path.** (Ps 119:105)

Mark 11: 1-11

LEADER: In this is the Gospel of the Lord:

RESPONSE: **Praise to Jesus Christ, the Word!**

Hymn 244 Trotting, trotting through Jerusalem

(Words available on Hymn Sheet)

SHARING THE WORD

Procession into the heart

Do you know what this poem is about?

“When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

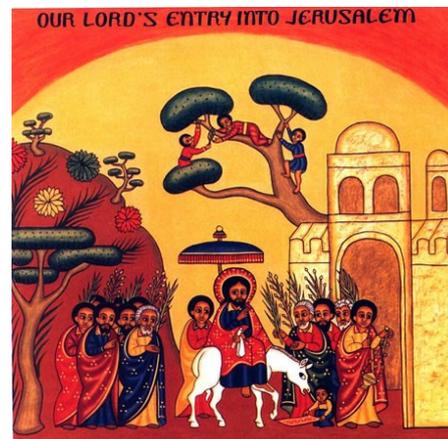
With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil’s walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

It is by G. K. Chesterton (Gilbert Keith, 1874-1936) and is called, “The Donkey.” All four Gospels portray Jesus riding a donkey on his procession into the heart of Jerusalem.¹ We may also share Mary Oliver’s poem, *The Poet thinks about the Donkey*.

What is your experience of processions? I once belonged to a church community that joined with other church groups for an outdoor gathering on Palm Sunday, which was followed by a walk through the streets, waving palm branches and singing. Some years I felt a bit embarrassed about us doing that. But later I felt that it was good for our community to



An Ethiopian Icon



¹ Matthew 21; Mark 11; Luke 19 and John 12.

see that Christian people were happy to acknowledge their faith out on the street in an obvious way. From time to time, Christians are known to join with other communities of faith, and no faith, to process for an important reason. Examples include the walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000 to promote reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians; Record numbers of Australians joined processions to try preventing the Australian Government committing to the war in Iraq (2003); the 2015 marches around Australia to urge action on climate change; and, most recently, the 15th March “March4Justice” rally in Canberra (and other cities) demonstrating that people will turn out for a cause they believe in. A political centre is an obvious place, if you are seeking to effect change.

Reading today’s passage is important, because it goes to the heart of Mark’s Gospel, as well as into the heart of Jerusalem where Jesus was heading. Jesus’ life and death reminds us that even a seemingly benign challenge to the ‘powers that be’ can have dreadful consequences. And Jesus understood that his approach to Jerusalem was risky. He knew that he was popular amongst the least powerful, and that his journey was taking him towards those who had something to lose. Why allow Jesus to continue his life-giving ministry? Too threatening, too dangerous.

The procession of welcome for Jesus into Jerusalem has little of the grandeur and organisation of a state visit or welcome ceremony. It bears none of the marks of an invading army coming into the heart of a conquered city. Jesus is neither a proud conqueror returning home, clothed in glory and might, nor a monarch arriving for coronation. Today, you might imagine a procession in Beijing, Moscow, Washington, or Canberra: a procession that is a display of power. Jerusalem had seen many such processions of the great ones entering and leaving its gates. In the course of a typical day in the First Century, this event may have been one of a number of interesting distractions, except for two things: (i) the careful preparation that Jesus had taken, and (ii) the importance it was given by his followers then, and ever since.

Jesus had prepared the procession into the heart of Jerusalem. He had chosen a “foal that had never been ridden” (verse 2). This is not necessarily an act of humility [[A reader may offer a quotation on this matter from the biblical scholar, M. D. Hooker](#)].² No mistake: Jesus knew that his and Jerusalem’s destinies were connected. He was willing to take the risk and to challenge the authority of those who ruled the temple at the heart of the city. It is true that in Mark’s gospel there is a feeling of anticlimax (verse 11), where it says, “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.” Yet, the challenge was serious, as later events showed.

I recommend that you take some time today to read on from verses 12 to 19 at least. Taking Mark’s Gospel seriously, we must recognise that Jesus knew what he was doing.

The importance of this event for us today has a lot to do with our own responses to Jesus. As Jesus rides towards the heart of our lives and our worship, how do you feel about it? As he brings his way of living face to face with ours, what will he see when he “takes a look around at everything” in our lives?

Allowing Jesus’ procession into the heart of our lives is a wonderful choice to make. Shall we take the risk and welcome him? If we do, our lives and our Church may find a joy and a purpose we have not yet imagined. The responses of the people seem to have been

² “The choice of an ass has generally been interpreted as an act of humility, but to ride any animal in these circumstances rather than walk was scarcely humble.” In fact, the ass was an appropriate mount for a king in the ancient world, and the fundamental contrast between ass and horse was that the latter was used in battle.” Hooker, Morna D. (1991). [The Gospel according to Saint Mark](#) (p. 257). London: Continuum.

spontaneous. We have a Church calendar that prepares us, each year, for what is so often called 'Palm Sunday.' In literal terms, Mark's Gospel speaks of cloaks and leafy branches from trees, as does Matthew; Luke tells about crowds spreading their cloaks on the ground; John is the only one to tell of palm branches! Palms may be fun, but they are not essential for our response to the approaching challenge of Jesus. It is the response, not the form or decoration that matters. Yet, for the moment, it is party time for the supporters! And for everyone, eventually, there is some serious confronting to do. Jesus is already here. Our response to his arrival is crucial. How may a congregation like ours welcome Jesus in our local community and world?

How shall we cry *Hosanna*? Our answer to that question is urgent.

Hymn *Prayer of Peace*, #1, Vol. 1, *As One Voice*
(Words available on Hymn Sheet)



OFFERINGS AND DEDICATION PRAYER

NOTICES

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (Prepared and led by Perce Marland)

Today is Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week and the Sunday before Easter. Holy Week reflects the huge emotional contrast between the joy of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and the awful agony of his crucifixion. So today, these events will be at the forefront of our prayers. Let us pray.

Merciful God, we turn our hearts this week to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As believers, we know how privileged we are to be able to benefit from his sacrifice. Stir up within us a clear acknowledgment of the gift of faith and our gratitude for His time on earth and all that he demonstrated to us. We are aware of how great our debt is to You and our Saviour Lord. Stir us by your mysterious Spirit to be more like Christ in word and deed. We admit to being something less than the people you intended us to be. Yet we come before you as the people of the New Covenant and bring before you our concerns for this world, its people, living creatures and all its resources.

For too long, we have been witness to the abject misery of millions of people across the globe, in places like Myanmar and Syria, their suffering often the result of armed gangs, military coups and a viciousness born of evil. We pray for all those traumatised by these conflicts and ask that they be given relief from their pain and the overwhelming grief arising from the death of family members. We pray that agencies like Act for Peace will grow as a result of our participation and become ever more influential in the delivery of their services to suffering humankind. In Australia, the protests of women about sexual violence, domestic violence and job inequalities have echoed across the land. There has been a tidal wave of tears and rage across Australia at these abuses. That such mistreatment of women is commonplace is nothing short of disgraceful and shameful. May these pleas for justice be heard and acted upon by governments at state and national levels, promptly and effectively.

Heavenly Father, we are disturbed by the diminishing influence of the Christian Church in our society, evidenced by the decrease in church income and the resultant increase in numbers of part-time ministerial appointments. We pray that this decline in influence will be reversed so that the divine love Your Son practised and advocated will be more and more evident throughout the world. We pray that church leaders everywhere will strive to discern Your will and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and be strengthened and given divine direction in their service for You. We have heard with great joy of the possibility of an expansion of the work at Junction 142. We pray that these plans will come to fruition and prosper for the good

of many. We pray that the spiritual leadership offered by our new minister, Rev. Park, will be richly blessed.

Many in our local church and community are burdened by ill-health, poverty, unemployment and other concerns. Impress on our hearts and minds the urgency of their need for love, comfort and support. For those on our prayer list we ask for mercy and healing. May we be moved to act with love, strength and vigour to: Feed the hungry; Comfort those who are lonely and in poor health; Find shelter for the homeless; and

Encourage all to seek the blessings of a personal knowledge of Jesus and His ways.

And now let us say together the Lord's prayer.

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 forever.
Amen.



Hymn 613 *Lord of all hopefulness*
(Words available on Hymn Sheet)

BENEDICTION

The grace of Christ attend you;
the love of God surround you;
the Holy Spirit keep you;
this day and forever. **Amen**

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