

Palm Sunday 2020

Good morning folks, hope you are all doing well and following advice from the government to keep yourself and others safe. Welcome to our Palm Sunday short service. We are not holding palm crosses in our hands today, which we normally do on Palm Sunday, but we can hold the cross of our Lord Jesus on our hearts and minds and welcome him in our lives and in this unusual service and say **“Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of our Lord, hosanna in the highest.”**

Prayer of Approach

We sing, we wave our branches, we shout 'Hosanna.'

Then, we turn away, to go back to our old ways,
our old lives, our old sins.

But God is in the business of granting forgiveness
and filling us with new life.

Let us pray to the One who comes to fill us with his love and
grace and who will keep us safe from Covid-19.

Prayer of Approach

Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you with heart and life and voice,
not with outward signs such as palm branches or the
occasional "Hosanna this year," but with lives truly turned
towards you.

Lord Jesus Christ,

when our words and actions reflect a reluctance
to confess you publicly as Lord of our lives:

Forgive us.

When we fear that humbling ourselves
would be seen by others as weakness,
some kind of defect in our character:

Forgive us.

When we have betrayed your love for us through our lack of
love

for you, for others, and for ourselves: especially at this time,

Forgive us.

When we find ourselves glossing over the events of your
passion and death

because we look forward to Easter and this time of trouble as a
time to enjoy holidays and have fun.

Forgive us.

Lord Jesus Christ, fix your mind in us;

remake us in your likeness;

empty us of all that hinders us from following you

to where pain and suffering,

exploitation and injustice exist.

Gracious and loving God, empower us with the Holy Spirit

so that our lives continually glorify you

and our tongues forever confess Jesus as Lord.

This we pray in Jesus' name who is our King and Lord. Amen

Hymn 365 Ride on! Ride on in majesty!

Reading: Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon: "HE HAD THE TICKER"

So the disciples went and did what Jesus had told them to do.. They brought the donkey, and the colt, threw their cloaks over them, and Jesus got on. A large crowd of people spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ,

The crowds walking in front of Jesus and those walking behind began to shout: Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"(V 6-9)

To be told: "You have the ticker for this" means that we are seen to have the capacity and drive to see a task through no matter how adverse the circumstances are.

With Jesus I call this his love-courage. He had the ticker. Jesus showed extraordinary love-courage on Palm Sunday when he confronted his opponents and was ready to see the results through to the awful end.

He was determined.

*Against the powerful whirlpools of his own anxieties and fears,
against the temptation to turn around and not throw his
life away.*

against the sorrow that at times soaked his very bones,

Jesus climbed the donkey and headed down the winding road to Jerusalem surrounded by disciples. Though none of them understood him, but joined the crowd that cheered him for all the wrong reasons. He rode that little donkey as a Prince of Peace entering his holy city.

With a bright flash of conviction in his mind, Jesus followed his faith as it led him to confront his scheming enemies and face inevitable arrest, suffering and death.

With extraordinary love-courage, Jesus who “had the ticker” created Palm Sunday.

Now the question is, “Why does Palm Sunday hold such a special fascination?”

Maybe because for once, Jesus was being cheered as he deserved to be cheered.

Maybe because of the beauty of the love-courage which he displayed - that love-courage which is the hope of this weary old world.

And thinking about courage, what brand of courage is this?

It is not the impulsive recklessness of those not recognising danger.

Not the bravery of those who seem born without capacity for deep fear.

Not the desperate fighting of a cornered creature.

Not human pride looking for its moment of glory.

This courage of Jesus is something different. It is special. It was displayed despite of anxiety and fear about the outcome of that first Palm Sunday.

His commitment was unique in its purity. It is the courage born of faith, hope and love. But above all it is born of love. That is why I used the phrase “love-courage” to describe the actions of Jesus.

Jesus was not a helpless victim. He was in charge of this situation. He was all too aware of the outcome. He said, “**No man takes my life from me.... I lay it down of my own accord.**”

He was not fooled by some fantasy that he had the power to change the attitude of his enemies in Jerusalem. He had no illusion at all. His very soul shrank and trembled at what lay ahead.

On the other hand, his disciples were still in fantasy land. Very much so. With the crowd all around them they were on clouds. They really thought Jesus would now display his physical might and come into his own, in the worldly way they expected. A crown and a kingdom. They saw success and glory within their grasp.

But Jesus knew things would soon end in what would seem like disastrous.

In the middle of the crowd, our Lord was almost unbearably lonely. Anxiety and fear about his certain fate must have tormented him. He knew there would be no special intervention

by the God who provided wild lilies with the beauty and the birds with their daily food. No supernatural action to prevent the agony and death that awaited him.

Yet there in that Holy City was where he had to be. This was his mission. He had to remain true. He had the ticker for the job. There was no turning back. He was determined to see it through to the end, and trust it all into the hands of his Father in heaven. Only love-courage drove him on into the city of Jerusalem, which was named as the place of peace but would provide little peace for his body or soul.

THE AGE OF ANXIETY

You and I are no strangers to anxiety and fear especially at this Covid-19 pandemic.

Fear is that inner tremor we feel when we are confronted by a definite, recognised danger such as the terrible suffering and death this virus is causing and engulfing so many lives everyday.

Anxiety is that inner agitation and confusion we experience when confronted by threats we cannot exactly predict or prepare for.

The beginning of this decade could be the “age of anxiety” with newer threats of life and undreamed challenges, more than even in the war time. We had wild fires in Australia earlier on and now this coronavirus, threat to our lives, and our world – killing so many lives every day and causing infections in so many lives.

We are anxious about virus, about the outcome, about the future, about terrorism, anxious about fluctuating economic and employment conditions, anxious about global warming.

The increasing number of high security, “gated” housing settlements, with coded entry and guards permanently on duty, maintaining social distancing at shops and avoiding physical contacts is a powerful witness to anxiety in the world.

Some folk don’t seem to have the ticker that is needed to live creatively through these days.

My dear friends, then, how do we react to the threats that create anxiety?

Do we panic and rush into ill considered counter measures.

Some nervous folks are foolish enough to put their trust in some new political doctrine or leader.

Some go to new religions, following the bizarre and boastful sects that have sprung up all over the place.

Some turn to drugs, both the legal ones like alcohol and prescription drugs, or some to the illegal drugs.

Others just withdraw in home and family. Close their hearts to the world around them. Settle for a life of shelter and security; working, eating, sleeping, and building high fences around their properties.

Allowing for notable exceptions, I fear that our society is marked by absence of love-courage. It does not seem to have the ticker needed for these changing and challenging times.

Our society is deficient in the kind of spiritual and moral drive that Jesus showed on that first Palm Sunday. It refuses to permit a flash of bright conviction in the mind and soul to lead it forward. There is a lamentable lack of willingness to get involved and fulfil ones true destiny. Instead we opt for easy answers or diversions. We are not prepared to face misunderstanding, rejection and offering for any righteous cause.

My dear brothers and sisters, there is no doubt that the source of Jesus' courage was love: The love he knew God had for him, the love he had for God. Pure agape. Love is the clue to trusting and risking in God's name. God's love provides the basic security from which we can take risks and defy evil.

For Jesus, God is agape, and therefore the way of love must inevitably bring the best outcome. Not the easiest outcome. Not the most profitable outcome. But the best outcome. Even his suffering and death would somehow, in God's realm, bring a better outcome than turning his back on Jerusalem and playing it safe.

THE WAY TO THE FUTURE

Jesus had the ticker. Palm Sunday shows us pure love-courage. Palm Sunday invites us to share in this love-courage of God.

Jesus mounted that donkey and rode down that road into his painful destiny. Glorious stuff! The authentic way to that future which is ultimately always in God's hands.

At this time of fear and anxiety we need to follow Jesus' example to show love – courage to those around us and ask God's Spirit to help calm our fears and anxiety. We should leave all our burdens and worries and anxieties on Jesus because he has the courage and power to take care of us and lead us to the other end - to the pastures green through his love for us. His blood will save us and our loved one and the whole world. Because he says, come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, I will give you rest. We will remain safe in his dwelling place, if we let him to be the in charge of our lives. Amen

Prayer:

Dear God, these uncertain times and constant struggles feel intense right now. We're weary and worn. We feel exhausted and discouraged. We feel afraid, Lord.

You know our hearts and you hear our prayers. We don't know what the future holds, but we know you're holding us, and we thank you that you're in all of our tomorrows. Please help us to remember that you are there, close, and you promise never to leave us.

Thank you that you are our Refuge and our Strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Help us to trust you more, to stop wasting so much time just spinning our wheels, distracted and worried, or wrestling in our own strength.

Gracious God, we know that your desire is for us to live this life abundantly and free. Thank you that you are greater than

anything we face here in this life and our desire is to reflect your love and light to a world that so desperately needs your hope.

Lord, we pray for your help at this challenging time – at this pandemic as we know that you are our only hope.

Lord, to those shaken and confused, grant guidance.

To those frightened of what they may have to face, grant reassurance.

To those worried and showing the symptoms of infection, grant wisdom to take the appropriate steps.

To those most at risk especially to those whose health is taking a turn for the worst, grant quality care and healing.

To those, who despite the best efforts of medical staff, are dying, grant relief from any physical distress.

To those wrestling with the bitterness of bereavement, grant comfort and hope, even amid the tears.

Lord, help us to keep our eyes on you and off our circumstances.

We love you Lord and we need you today. We're reminded of our weakness, but we know that in you, we are strong. We lift up our hearts and hands to worship you. Thank you for your great love and care. Thank you that you surround us like a shield. We choose to find rest in you today.

In Jesus' name, we pray this, Amen.

Benediction:

May the Father, who so loved the world that He gave His only Son, keep you safe.

May Christ, who accepted the cup of sacrifice in obedience to the Father's will, keep you steadfast and walk with you through this crisis.

May the Spirit, who strengthens us to suffer with Christ that we may share His glory, set your minds on life and peace.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit Be with you and remain with you, and with those you love, now and always.