



Palm Sunday Service - Sunday 5th April 2020

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What a weird situation we're in right now...we've been on lockdown for almost 2 weeks now and are being told that we shouldn't go out unless it is absolutely essential.....



How many of us, on New Years Eve 2019, could have envisaged that in the first 3 months of 2020 we would see incredible bush fires in Australia which destroyed over 27 million acres and killed approximately 1 billion animals and birds, we saw a series of storms battering the UK leading to some of the worst flooding we've ever seen in this country, and no sooner was this off the front pages we got news of a virus affecting China, which then rapidly spread to the rest of the world, causing at least 34,000 deaths so far?

FEAR! Fear of the unknown, fear of the future.

We've seen horrible reports of people stock-piling large amounts of groceries and toilet roll, leaving many, especially the elderly to go without, and now we're seeing rubbish bins full of wasted food. We're hearing of people becoming violent in supermarkets and pharmacies....and do you know what leads people to do these things....fear, fear of the unknown, fear of the future.



Perfect Love Casts out Fear! 1 John 4:18 We are told in The Bible at least 80 times not to fear. Fear has no place in the heart or mind of a believer. If you are struggling with this, ***ask God to increase your trust and faith in His willingness and ability to deliver you completely from fear and anxiety.*** God is love, perfect love, and the closer we come to Him, the less power fear has over us, because we feel Gods continual presence - ***His*** strength, ***His*** comfort, ***His*** guidance.

The key is really abiding in His love, on a daily, or even hourly basis. It has to be more than a Biblical truth in our lives, we need to experience it continually.



A Brief Testimony

Some of you will know this, but my life, and that of my families, got turned upside down a few years ago when one day I woke up following a night shift in incredible pain, and that was basically the end of my career. I'm one of those people that never knew what I wanted to do in life and tried all sorts of different roles ranging from life-guard to windsurfing instructor to plumber and then when I decided I wanted to do something that didn't involve water!



I took on a role at an Amazon Fulfilment Centre in Swansea. At the time this was a stop-gap job as I was self-employed and work was drying up around the Christmas period and I needed some money to ensure Sallyann got a Christmas present. ***She has expensive tastes, let me tell you!!***

It really was the best thing that could have happened to us. Around this time my health was starting to suffer, and working for Amazon meant a regular income and when I got a permanent contract a few weeks later, private healthcare. Without this I honestly don't know where we would be. Being able to access the private system meant I was getting tests done and seeing specialists I would have had to wait years for on the NHS!

While all these investigations were going on, I was working hard and managed to get a couple of promotions so now I was in charge of a team of up to 50 employees, and really felt that I was finally finding my career. Life was good, we had a decent income, a lovely house, Sallyann was enjoying teaching Owain and Rhiannon at home, whilst trying to contain Steffan who from day one was a bundle of energy and love!!

And then, ***wham!*** That life was dramatically changed when I could barely get out of bed, painkillers barely touched the pain and my private healthcare stopped when my employment with Amazon stopped. I'll be honest, at the time I was angry and upset, and in a lot of pain! I felt that I'd lost my identity...I'd gone from having a team of people to lead to struggling to find any reason behind why any of this had happened.

Our identity is 'In Christ' Having had a good chat with a good friend who was the pastor of the small church we were attending in Pontardawe, in the South Wales valleys, we discussed Job, and how our identities are in Christ!

It felt like this was a time to really think about where life was heading and looking back we've seen God work in so many different ways in our lives.

Colossians 3.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

There were time when I looked to the sky and was like **“really?!”** But then I just took a moment to see what God has already done in our lives and the peace only God can give descended and it reminded me that He is in control and I need not worry.

After the surgery I had to fuse my neck, my first conscious thought was Philippians 4:13 It was a slightly scrambled version, the fact I can remember it is surely a sign that God put it in my mind given I was on so many drugs at the time!!

I never expected my life to turn out this way, there are now quite a few things which I used to love doing, that I can't anymore, or struggle with at least. I've been told I'm not allowed to go windsurfing anymore or go on rollercoaster, and have you ever tried swimming without being able to bend your neck. I kind of have to go for it until I hit the wall at the other end!! But God has blessed us with so much, including bringing us back to Cumbria!!

Palm Sunday - The start of the unexpected....

Today is Palm Sunday, the day when we reflect on the time when Jesus triumphantly rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Luke describes this arrival, ***“As he was drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest”***

There is no doubt what was in the disciples minds. This was the fulfilment to a prophecy found in Zechariah, this is the Message version....***“Shout and cheer, Daughter Zion! Raise the roof, Daughter Jerusalem! Your King is coming! A good king who makes all things right, a humble king riding a donkey, a mere colt of a donkey.***

The long-awaited Messiah had come, the king of Israel, and not just of Israel but of all the earth. Jerusalem would be his capital city. From here he would rule the world in peace and righteousness.

What a day this was!

The crowds went wild as Jesus and his disciples got nearer. This was the moment the crowds had been waiting for. All the old songs came flooding back, and they were singing, chanting, cheering and laughing. At last, their dreams were going to come true. But in the middle of it all, their leader wasn't singing, **he** was in tears as he approached the city.

Not like the monarchs of old, who sat on their jewelled and ivory thrones, dispensing their justice and wisdom. Nor was he the great warrior king some had wanted. He didn't raise an army and ride to battle at it's head. He was riding on a donkey, toward the victory that would restore all things.



For I can do all things, through Christ Jesus who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

Yes, their dreams were coming true, but not in the way they'd imagined. He was not the king they expected!

What was it all about? What did Jesus think he was doing?

The tension of the moment must have been tremendous.

- **Would** Jesus whip up the crowds and storm the Governors house?
- **Would** he call down fire from heaven to consume the enemies of God?
- **Would** any of his followers be lost in the struggle?

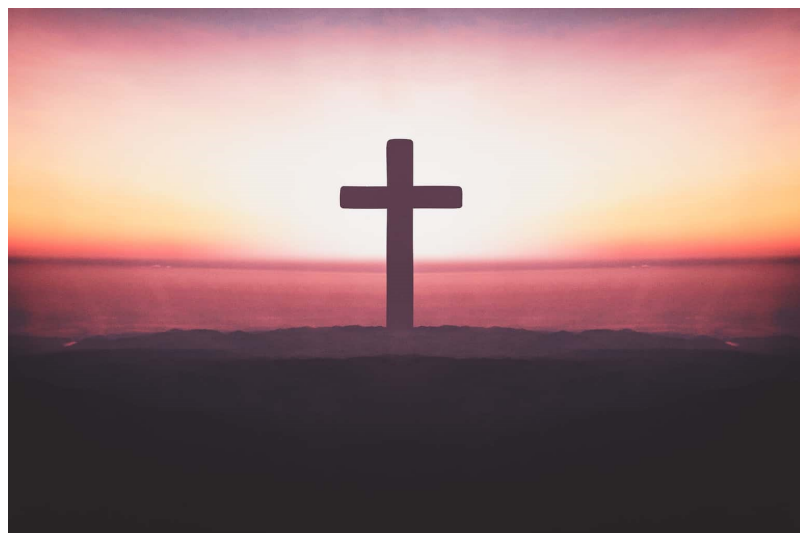
The Pharisees had a double reason for wanting this kind of welcome silenced. On one hand, this Jesus was a threat to their authority, and they envied his popularity. On the other hand, they feared a Roman backlash to all this inciteful talk of another king. Therefore they say to Jesus, **“Teacher, rebuke your disciples”**. But he answered, **“I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out”**.



No, he's not going to rebuke them for this, not now- the hour has come. The authority of the Pharisees is done for. If the Romans come, they come, He will not silence the truth any longer. At this point the disciples understanding of Jesus kingship is flawed, but the upcoming events will soon correct that. The entry into Jerusalem with waving palms was a short-lived preview of the eternal Palm Sunday to come, and it needed to be said, **if the disciples didn't say it the rocks would!**

Had Jesus taken his throne on that first day of palms, none of us would ever be robed in white or waving palms of praise in the age to come!

There had to be the cross, and that is what the disciples had not yet understood!



In **Luke 9**, as Jesus prepared to leave Galilee for Jerusalem, he tried to explain this to his disciples. In verse 22 he said **“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”**, in verse 44 he told them, **“Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men.”** Verse 45 however tells us **“They did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them that they should not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask him about this saying”**

SO, we see that the disciples understanding of Jesus last journey to Jerusalem was flawed. They saw him as a king moving in to take control, and he was, but they couldn't grasp that the victory Jesus would win in Jerusalem over sin, Satan, and death, was a victory that would be won through his own horrible suffering and death; and that **the kingdom which they thought would be established immediately would come in a very different way and reach it's fulfilment in a very different time frame!**

The disciples misunderstanding of Jesus journey to Jerusalem results in a misunderstanding of the meaning of discipleship.

This is important for us to see, so we don't make the same mistake.

In Luke chapter 9 v 51 we read ***"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem"***. To resolutely set out towards Jerusalem meant something very different for Jesus than it did for his disciples. You can picture the visions of greatness that must have danced in their heads. Jerusalem and glory were just around the corner; what it would mean when Jesus took the throne, but Jesus had another vision in his head. Can you imagine carrying this knowledge all alone and for so long? This is what Jerusalem meant for Jesus, as they were walking through the towns and villages, he told his disciples ***"In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"***

Jerusalem meant one thing for Jesus: certain death, and He knew it wasn't going to be a quick and heroic death. He predicted in Luke 18, ***"We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again."***

**When Jesus resolutely, or purposefully, set out for Jerusalem,
he purposefully set out to die.**

Remember though, that Jesus was human like us, he felt pain like we do, he had a mother and brothers and sisters, he had special places he liked to be. To turn his back on all of this and set out towards vicious whipping and beating, and spitting and mocking, and crucifixion, was not easy. It was hard. I can't even begin to imagine the thoughts that must have been going through his head, what he must have been feeling, but I also don't know of any other way for us to begin to know how much he loved us.

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends"

If we were to look at Jesus' death merely as a result of a betrayer's deceit, the Sanhedrin's envy, Pilate's spinelessness and the soldiers' nails and spear, it might seem very involuntary, and the benefit of salvation that comes to us who believe might be viewed as God's way of making a virtue out of a necessity!

- Jesus wasn't accidentally entangled in a web of injustice,
- The saving benefits of his death for sinners were not an afterthought,
- God planned it all out of infinite love to sinners

When Jesus set out towards Jerusalem he wasn't merely taking our place, he was setting our pattern!

SO, Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and we read that *"he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem."* James and John asked Jesus *"Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"*. Jesus had already named these brothers "Sons of Thunder" and we're now seeing why!! I mean, these disciples hadn't long been given gifts to drive out demons and to cure diseases, they now wanted to use their power to destroy things, and to be honest, who wouldn't want the chance to try that out!! You can imagine what they were thinking! But Jesus turns to them, rebukes them, and they simply carry on to another town!.

SO what does this mean? It means, first of all, that a mistaken view of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem can lead to a mistaken view of discipleship. If Jesus had come to judge and take up an earthly throne then it would make sense for the sons of thunder to begin this judgement as they approach the Holy City. But if Jesus did not come to judge but to save then a completely different type of discipleship is needed.

Does discipleship mean raining fire down on God's enemies in righteous anger, or does it mean following Jesus on the road to Calvary which leads to suffering and death?

What we find is this....

- The surprise about Jesus the Messiah is that he came to live a life of sacrificial, dying service before he comes a second time to reign again in glory.
- The surprise about discipleship is that it requires a life of sacrificial, dying service before we can reign with Christ in glory.

What James and John had to learn, and what we must learn, is that Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is our journey. We can only save our life if we follow Christ on the Calvary road. Jesus died to save us from the power and punishment of sin, not so that we could have an easy life on earth.

Jesus started the events of what we know as Holy Week by deliberately riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. He continued to deliberately pursue the road to the cross. **The Roman authorities and religious leaders were not in control.** They did the worst that they could do to God, and God did the best he could do for us when Jesus died and rose again for us.

Luke 9..."Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."

This Palm Sunday let us rejoice in what Jesus has done, not just in declaring who He is, but also because He carried out God's plan to save us through His life, death and resurrection. **If we worship Him and follow Him, then however unexpectedly life may turn out, we can know that we are a part of God's plan.**

A Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of prayer. Thank you that in the midst of sorrow, confusion, upheaval and fear we can come into your presence to experience your comfort and peace because of what Jesus did for us.

Saturate us with your presence and peace, so that our spirits are completely assured that you are in control and working out your purposes at this time, as you always have through out history.

The events of Palm Sunday remind us that your ways are above our ways and that your purposes are not subject to popular opinion. Thank you that your goodness and grace exceed our expectations time and time again.

Help us as your children to reflect your hope and confidence in your goodness to those around us who are fearful at this time.

In Jesus name, Amen