

JESUS AT THE CENTRE

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus wept over the city and said, 'If only you had known this day the way that leads to peace! But no; it is hidden from your sight.' – Lk.19,41-42

Collect:

Lord Jesus Christ, on the first Palm Sunday you entered the rebellious city where you were to die. Enter our hearts, we pray, and subdue them to yourself. And as your disciples blessed your coming and spread garments and branches in your way, make us ready to lay at your feet all that we have and are, that we too may bless your coming in the name of the Lord. Amen

Hosanna to the Son of David

You are the King of glory,
You are the Prince of peace,
You are the Lord of heaven and earth,
You're the Son of righteousness.
Angels bow down before You,
worship and adore,
for You have the words of eternal life,
You are Jesus Christ the Lord.
Hosanna to the Son of David!
Hosanna to the King of kings!
Glory in the highest heaven,
for Jesus the Messiah reigns!

Words and music by Mavis Ford

Lk.19,28-44

"After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go

to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" say, "The Lord needs it."

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They replied, 'The Lord needs it.' They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' Some of Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you.'

Dear friends

Joy is in the air and celebration! People gather in happy anticipation, filled with the sense that the good days are finally about to return. At the centre of this joyous celebratory welcome is Jesus, who is riding towards Jerusalem on a donkey. The songs and shouts of the disciples and others give the reason for this happy party-mood – the man on the donkey is the long-awaited 'king who comes in the name of the Lord', whose coming their Scriptures have foretold.

That he is this king, of this the people are convinced by the miracles they have seen him do or have heard about him. Jesus himself, the man openly at the centre of these celebrations, does not object to this welcome. And this is not out of vanity. When the people had tried to make him king at an earlier stage he had very much refused. But now he accepts the endorsement he receives. Why? It reveals the fulfilment of Scripture. The event witnesses to the fact that what Scripture foretold is now here: God's Word is here! This is the reason why he says to the objecting Pharisees, 'I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

Dear friends, this scenario of joy and celebration by way of contrast may make us the more aware of our own situation and our hope for a return of the good days, for a time whose coming we have been longing for for a while, when we can celebrate and enjoy life without restrictions. Instead, fear and restrictions prevail; we're told not to celebrate (yet?), any anticipation of better days is not to be exuberant but at best 'cautiously optimistic'. This perhaps depresses the inclination to seek the joy of Palm Sunday and join in the celebration. Perhaps we think that one cannot really know the joy of Palm Sunday if one does not have the material joy of having a good time (peace on earth, as it were), if, as we now experience it, the external circumstances of our lives lacks somewhat a cause for celebration.

Now, we could let this thought keep us from considering the joy surrounding this man at the centre. But what we should do is let it be helpful to us, in the sense that we let it sharpen and focus our eyes to look at the man at the centre, to turn from the joy we may be lacking to the joy we may be caused to find in the man riding on the donkey.

Let us remember, and hold the thought, that he is none less than *'the king who comes in the name of*

the Lord! Should his coming not blessing – blessing of the highest order? Does not the *name of the Lord* mean all goodness? Should not *his coming* – the word of his coming, the reason for his coming, the result of his coming – in itself be the cause of a joy nothing else can or does yield nor overcome? The joy of which Jesus spoke to his disciples when he said, *'Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy'*? (Jn.16,22) Should not his coming, then, be the coming of 'your joy'?

But let us be disciplined here (for want of a better word) and not lose the prospect of this joy straightaway by hanging it on ideas of joys regarding which Christ is irrelevant (or merely seen to be the delivery boy). His coming is not in our name, in the name of our joys and pleasures, but in the name of the Lord, our joy! The rich young ruler lost the prospect of this joy the moment (and for as long as) he decided that his joy was to remain in his possessions.

Of the joy, on the other hand, which the rich young ruler discarded, we have the following witness, Paul: *"Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things."* (Phil.3,7-8)

In the song (Ps.118,26) the disciples sing announcing the coming of the king – the coming of 'your king' – there is an indication of what this coming means and why the joy of this coming should be of a worth surpassing all things, worth even the loss of all things. The indicator is in the words *'Peace in heaven'*. It means, the man at the centre, the king riding on a donkey, is our joy because his kingdom is not of this world, because the peace he brings is about peace in heaven.

How far we may be from recognising this peace, and therefore the joy that is Christ Jesus, appears in the tears that Jesus sheds over Jerusalem as he approaches it. He weeps over the city, because it does not know *'on this day what would bring you peace'*; because they will reject him when they realise that he is God's claim on them. Not peace in joy and celebration awaits Jerusalem but judgment and death *'because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you.'*

Do Jesus' tears not ask us whether we recognise it? Whether we recognise the time of God's coming? Recognise that God finds our heart in rebellion against Him, refusing to let Him be God, not willing to let him be at the centre of our lives? Whether we recognise that we have no greater need than for peace in heaven, then that we have peace with God?

Only peace in heaven yields the joy that nothing can take from you. In the heart that is at peace with God all strife and rebellion has ceased and fear is driven out, it knows of life's ultimate and greatest celebration and is a guest at it. Of this Jesus speaks to his disciples when he says: *'Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'* (Lk.10,20)

This peace, dear friends, is the man at the centre of the Palm Sunday celebration and joy, who is riding on a donkey. May we recognise it and in faith acknowledge it to our joy! May we know that he doesn't ride on a horse because he hasn't come to judge the people, but that he rides a donkey because he has come to carry the burden of our sin, of our rebellion, of our wilful rejection of heaven, because he has come to bring peace. May we realise that we find our joy as we follow him by faith into his rejection and death on our behalf, thereby being united to him, and into his resurrection to new life, even life everlasting. May you recognise the time of God's coming to you as through the gospel (for your faith!) Christ is held out to you as the Saviour in whom your sins are forgiven, your death born, your name written in heaven, in whom your soul finds rest and knows the love which drives out all fear. He is your joy. AMEN

Lord God, the joy of knowing and serving you, of being able to say “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you” is the fruit of the peace Christ has given us, a peace which is beyond all understanding because it is peace in heaven, peace with you. To you be all praise, glory and honour for the joy that is ours through the king who came in your name to take our sins from us in his death and to raise us in him to a living hope and an imperishable inheritance. As the sinfulness of the heart wars with all its might against the knowledge of this joy, give us grace to seek the might of Christ, incomparably stronger, to rule over us and be at the centre, for the praise and glory of your name. AMEN

- time of prayer / intercession – [we pray for those who have become ill, are fighting illness or are recovering from it, for those in the caring professions and for those in positions of leadership and authority over us that they may seek to further justice, rule wisely and guard the values by which a society can flourish, that the course they are on may lead out of the pandemic; for those who have lost loved ones and need the loving presence of friends; we give thanks for the availability of vaccines and for all the help that is given and received; we pray for the despondent and the hopeless, for those who seek light, for the wisdom to comfort the suffering; we pray for our sister church in Northern India and for the body of Christ worldwide and here; we pray for God’s blessing on the preaching and teaching of His word, for people to respond in repentance and faith, for freedom and liberty and courage to stand for what is good and true and honours His name;]

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.

AMEN