

PALM SUNDAY

MARCH 25 | SUNDAY

*O worship the King all glorious above,
and gratefully sing his power and his love:
our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.*

Today, Christians around the world are celebrating Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem called "Palm Sunday," because the crowd welcomed Him by spreading palm branches in His path. They were convinced He was the Messiah (or "anointed one"), sent by God to establish His Kingdom on earth.

It must have been a dramatic sight as Jesus approached Jerusalem on a donkey (a sign of His humility). The Bible says, "*the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices ... 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!'*" (Luke 19:37-38). Even those who weren't part of that welcoming crowd listened eagerly to His teaching during the next few days.

But not everyone in Jerusalem welcomed Him; the very next verse says that "the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?'" But soon many turned against Jesus and demanded His death: "'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!'" (Matthew 27:22).

These weren't necessarily the same people who had welcomed Him—but the reversal is still striking. Were they disappointed because He refused to establish an earthly political kingdom? Probably. But Jesus didn't come to set up a new political system. He came instead to change our hearts and save us from our sins by His death and resurrection. He declared during that last week, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight. ... My kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). This deeply disappointed those who hoped He would throw out the hated Roman occupiers. They may also have disliked His demand that they repent.

Where would you have been on that first Palm Sunday? Among the disciples who welcomed Him—or among the skeptical crowds? It's easy to condemn those who condemned Jesus—but would we have acted any differently? We too are sinners, and we too have rebelled against God.

"No events in human history were more important than Jesus' death and resurrection, and yet many people (even Christians) never take time to study them." - Billy Graham Will you make time to know God who loves you so much, He sent His Son to conquer death through the cross and open the way for you to access the Father!

"Christ died for sins once for all ... to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

Welcome Him into your life during this holy season, won't you?

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Centre your thoughts on Christ who calls us to follow Him as you listen to this.

LISTEN **Be Still for the Presence of the Lord is in this place**

PRAYER

Jesus Christ invites everyone, "Come to me! Follow me! Let me teach you how God wants you to live!" We come to this place, into this time, at the invitation of Jesus Christ, who invites us, "Come now! Let's worship our Father together!"

Jesus the Christ invited us, we accept His call to worship.

Jesus the Christ taught us, so as his disciples we worship and praise God.

Jesus the Christ showed us Father God of Compassion, whom we proclaim among the poor, the destitute, those in the midst of despair. To them we proclaim the God of Hope.

Come, let us worship together and share our witness of God's living presence in the world. **AMEN.**

HYMN **All Glory Laud and Honour**

PRAYER for the World

O Lord! Jesus our Christ! You asked for a donkey, not a stallion horse to ride into Jerusalem. You rode over cloaks and under swaying palm branches, through a tunnel of shouts, receiving all the praise You deserved. Did we not shout enough praise to drown out the strong opposition to You a few days later?

Knowing what lay ahead, O Lord, you rode on. You rode straight into controversy without counting the cost; You rode towards the cross, oblivious of the curses. You rode straight into the hands of those who flogged you for no reason, to give us a prize we could never have earned by our own merits.

O Lord! The world has not changed! People are flogged and shot for no reason; people are murdered because they have the wrong colour of skin, or speak a different language in a strange accent; militants ambush people and behead children in pursuit of establishing an ideology. Lies and misinformation fill our news feeds, from shaming leaders to maligning products, including medicines for our own good.

O Lord! Save the innocent; look after the defenceless, protect those facing in justice and shield and safeguard those cannot speak for themselves

Hear these our prayers for this our world, we pray, for the sake of Christ's Kingdom to come. **AMEN.**

HYMN **Sing we the King who is coming to reign**

READING **Mathew 21:1-11**

When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: "Go over to the village across from you. You'll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, say, 'The Master needs them!' He will send them with you."

This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet:

Tell Zion's daughter, "Look, your king's on his way, poised and ready, mounted on a donkey, on a colt, foal of a pack animal." The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, "Hosanna to David's son!" "Blessed is he who comes in God's name!" "Hosanna in highest heaven!"

As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, "What's going on here? Who is this?" The parade crowd answered, "This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee."

HYMN O Worship the King! All glorious above

MESSAGE

Jesus seems to be travelling a lot between Galilee and Jerusalem, and all for good reason. Chapter 5 opens with the words, “*Afterwards Jesus returning to Jerusalem for one of the feast days.*” John doesn’t tell us which feast Jesus attended, it would have been most likely one of three major feasts at which attendance was required: Passover, Pentecost, or Purim.

There is considerable debate over the length of Jesus’ ministry. If this was a Passover, then we can date four Passovers in Jesus’ ministry and learn His ministry lasted about 3½ years!

Archeology has exposed the pool known in Hebrew as *Bethesda* (or *Bethsaida*) in the area just north of the temple area, and found to have five porches, just as John said. John says, “... *near the sheep gate was the pool of Bethesda*”, which suggests John was writing this **after** the fall of Jerusalem.

One of the most misunderstood miracles is the miracle of healing. In the 20th century, “Healing Crusades” were held in many cities across the world. People gathered by their hundreds, even thousands when a well-known “Healer” head-lined the event. There is a perception that we can call upon God for Healing, for a named person, on a given date, at a certain time, in a defined place.

Perhaps this record of the water in the Bethesda Pool being stirred by an angel at a moment in time during certain religious festivals, gives inspiration to the belief, we can call on God to heal. Matthew says Jesus’ mission was to **teach** the Word of God, **preach** the news about the Kingdom of God, and **heal** every kind of disease and illness¹; if we can teach and preach, we can also heal

Healing by the waters of the Pool of Bethesda was one of many unusual occasions healing recorded in the Bible.

- Some were healed by a purified pot of stew (2 Kings 4:38-41).

¹ Matthew 4:23

- Naaman was healed by washing in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:10-14).
- One was healed by touching the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20-21).
- A woman with a bleeding disorder for 12 years was healed by touching the tassels of Jesus shirt, worn by all Jewish men (Matthew 9:20-22, Luke 8:43-48, and Mark 5:25–34)
- Some were healed when the shadow of Peter fell upon them (Acts 5:14-16).
- Some were healed when Paul's handkerchiefs were laid upon them (Acts 19:11-12).

God does things in unexpected ways, because He is God, He can and He will! But we need to be careful; something isn't necessarily from God simply because it is unexpected or unusual.

On this day, by the Pool of Bethesda, something happened. A large crowd of sick people, blind, lame, paralysed, lay waiting for the stirring of the water. Their focus was on the water in the pool, watching intently for the first faint ripple. There would have been a rush towards the pool, each person wanting to be the first in.

This describes the human condition. In the midst of our pandemic, we are waiting for the first ripple of good news from the world of medicine, of science, of technology, from anywhere, to dive into, to grab hold of, to get the from go the queue, that ■ can be made whole again. But there are others,

- Some waiting for a more convenient season.
- Some waiting for dreams and visions.
- Some waiting for signs and wonders.
- Some waiting to be compelled.
- Some waiting for a revival.
- Some waiting for particular feelings.
- Some waiting for a celebrity.

While everyone else was intently focussed on the water in the pool, Jesus sees this despondent and dejected man. Jesus knew how long he had had this disability and asks him, “*Aren’t you going to make the effort towards the pool? Don’t you want to be healed? Have you no desire to be made a whole person?*”

This man was an interesting case of hope combined with hopelessness. He had hope, else he would have never come Poolside. Once there, hopelessness engulfed him. Unable to move himself towards the water to be healed for 38 years, he was resigned to the fact that in his condition, and given the crowds, his future is locked his present condition.

A man pauses beside him and they lock eyes. Everyone else was looking at the water to cure them, this man was looking at Jesus. His voice was loving, welcoming, yet had authority, “*Stand up! Pick up your mat! WALK!*” **Stand up** is Jesus command to act on faith! **Pick up your mat** is Jesus wanting this man to know his healing was permanent! **Walk!** is Jesus saying, You are a first person witness of what I did. Tell them *whodunnit!*

The closing line of this incident is strange isn’t it? *Now that you are healed, go and sin no more, else worse befalls you!* John tells us in v.5 this man *had been sick for 38 years*. This “sickness” was the result of a sin of the flesh, avenged in the flesh by way of that miserable life. Some translators understand the word “sick” to be one brought on by dissipated living, the descent into drunkenness and sexual dissipation and the squandering of money, energy, or resources.

Whatever brought on the man’s disability is not our business. This incident begs us to reconsider our attitude towards wholesome living. When calamity strikes, and it does to each and everyone of us, to what or whom do we turn? Science, medicine, friends, therapy, philosophy & psychology, sex-alcohol-and-drugs, new ways of living....?

We will sing the entire hymn in a minute, the refrain of which goes:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face!
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.*

That's what the disabled man of 38 years did! While others were looking at the pool of water, he locked eyes with the man who said to him, *You want to be healed don't you? Well... stand up, pick up your mat, ... and WALK.*

HYMN Turn your eyes upon Jesus

PRAYER

Father! Creator! God! You are here with us right now, calling us to lock eyes with You and trust You when you command us out of our "little faith", even at times our "lack of faith". Teach me to trust you, because you have my best interest in Your heart. You don't want my broken self in Heaven with You! You want me whole and restore into full fellowship with You. Accept me as I am. Command me to stand up in faith, discard my past, and WALK towards Your Future! **AMEN.**

BENEDICTION

Jesus calls you to praise and prayer, to song and to silence;

Jesus calls you to hear and heal with words.

Jesus calls you to serve and to love with your heart.

Jesus calls you to worship the Father with your heart, soul and mind.

Heed the call of Christ as you live His life in your family, among friends and in community. For the Glory of God, and the honour of the Holy Spirit, **AMEN**

HYMN How Great Thou Art

Thank you for joining in this wonderful time of worship. Make coffee/tea, slice a cake and listen to some uplifting singing by clicking **THIS!**