

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 28/03/21 – Palm Sunday

[To watch and follow the full service online click here](#)

Today we conclude our Lent worship series, Worship in the Wilderness, with A Surprising Journey. The outline for worship and some of the material has been prepared by Sam and Sara Hargreaves for Engage Worship as indicated.

Opening Declaration ¹

We welcome you, King Jesus, humble king, king of our lives,
with shouts of 'hosanna' for you are the God who saves.

We fix our eyes on you, King Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith,
our hope of a wilderness restored. **Amen.**

HYMN STF 362 ²

Meekness and majesty,
Manhood and Deity,
In perfect harmony,
The Man who is God.
Lord of eternity
Dwells in humanity,
Kneels in humility
And washes our feet.

*O what a mystery,
Meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship
For this is your God,
This is your God.*

Father's pure radiance,
Perfect in innocence,
Yet learns obedience
To death on a cross.
Suffering to give us life,
Conquering through sacrifice,
And as they crucify
Prays: 'Father forgive.'
O what a mystery,

Wisdom unsearchable,
God the invisible,
Love indestructible
In frailty appears.
Lord of infinity,
Stooping so tenderly,
Lifts our humanity
To the heights of His throne.
O what a mystery,

Reading – Mark 11: 1-10 ³

¹ As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, 'Hosanna!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' ¹⁰ 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!' 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

Prayer of Praise and Thanks

All praise to you, Jesus Son of God, Lord of all earth and heaven.
Let us, too, wave branches and flags of joy.
We shout out your name and sing your praises.

All praise to you, Jesus Son of man, who lived as one of us.
Let us follow you in our hearts and remember your life and death,
We remember your great goodness to us.
We shout out your name and sing your praises.

All praise to you, Jesus our Redeemer, Saviour of all.
We give thanks and praise for the amazing things you did for us.
We declare you are Lord and King
Blessed indeed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Glory to God in the highest. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Lord Jesus Christ, when our words and actions show 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, or some kind of defect in our character. **Forgive us.**

When we are happy to go with the crowd rather than stand up for what is right. When we follow You when You are praised and acclaimed but will not follow when danger threatens. **Forgive us.**

When our Hosannas are for the good times of blessing and celebration only. **Forgive us.**

When we have betrayed your love for us through our lack of love for you, for others, and for ourselves. **Forgive us.**

Lord Jesus Christ, fix your mind in us; and remake us in your likeness; empty us of all that hinders us from following you even if that is costly and painful for us. Gracious Father empower us by the Holy Spirit so that our lives continually glorify you and our tongues forever confess Jesus as Lord. This we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen**

Reading - Isaiah 35: 1-2, 6-7 + 10³

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.

The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God.

Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

And the ransomed of the Lord will return.

They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Reading – Hebrews 11: 32-40 ³

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated – ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. ³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Talk - A surprising journey

We are reaching the end of our journey through the wilderness, and heading into Holy Week. We've been preparing ourselves to journey with Jesus into his most difficult and barren period yet - his betrayal, trial, crucifixion and death. We, of course, know the end of the story - that the horror of Good Friday and the numb waiting of Easter Saturday will explode with joy into the victorious resurrection of Sunday morning. But for those who lived through that first Easter weekend, the struggle of this week was all too real. They had no way to know it would turn out okay in the end.

Our own wilderness experiences can be very much like that. Looking back, we can see how God has used dry, barren and difficult times to shape us. But when we are in the middle of them it is almost impossible to get that kind of perspective. And when good things come along they can take us by complete surprise, as God works in mysterious and unpredictable ways.

1) Surprising hope in the Old Testament

When we read the account in Hebrews 11 of the 'heroes of the Old Testament' we get the same kind of picture. The writer describes giants of faith, who nevertheless lived through some literal and metaphorical dreadful wilderness experiences. It says: 'Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (How they died is described) They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.'
(Hebrews 11:36-38)

These were not super-spiritual people who floated through life on a cloud. They struggled in the deserts of sorrow, rejection and physical violence. In the midst of this, the writer records some amazing answers to prayer. We are told that they were people who: 'through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.' (Hebrews 11:33-35) You might want to think who in the Old Testament is being referenced here.

Yes, they did see amazing answers to their faithful prayers. But when the writer comes to the end of the account we hear that: 'These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (complete).' (Hebrews 11:39-40)

2) Fulfilment in Jesus

The fulfilment that these mothers and fathers in the faith were looking for was only going to come in Jesus. The hopes of the people of God were pinned on this surprising Messiah who came as a helpless baby. He lived, not as a wealthy prince but as a homeless wanderer. He preached, not vengeance to Israel's oppressors but grace and love for enemies. And his triumphant entry into Jerusalem was not in a chariot of war, but in fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah from hundreds of years before: 'Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' (Zechariah 9:9)

The surprising answer to all of Israel's hopes is the 'man of humility', the servant king, on a donkey - a humble man, who would humble himself even to death on a cross. Those who welcomed him with palm branches and shouts of 'Hosanna' would quickly turn on him. The cross that appeared to be his final defeat would turn out to be his final victory over death, sin and the forces of evil. His resurrection would be as the first fruits of the resurrection of all things. It is the guarantee of the promise spoke by Isaiah: 'The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom... Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs... Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.' (Isaiah 35:1, 6-7, 10)

3) Living in the in-between

So what about us? Where do we live now? We live in the in-between. Jesus is risen. Death is defeated. We have the salvation of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. And yet, God hasn't quite finished with this 'wilderness world'. Christ's final coming is still awaited, and so we continue to experience both desert struggles and resurrection surprises. The promised land is before us, so the writer to the Hebrews encourages us to take heart from the Old Testament heroes and from Jesus, to finish this journey together: 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.' (Hebrews 12:1-3). Journeying with Jesus means drawing strength from him during the hard times. What an encouraging word to think about and to hold on to as we move on through Holy Week and to Easter.

We can know that he has walked this wilderness road before us, and that he is walking with us now. He is using even our struggles to transform us, and to prepare us for the day when all sorrow and sighing will flee away. Thanks be to him. Amen.

HYMN – STF 265 Henry Hart Milman (1791-1868)

1. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark all the tribes 'hosanna' cry;
Thine humble beast pursues his road
With palms and scattered garments strowed.
2. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die!
O Christ, thy triumphs now begin
O'er captive death and conquered sin.
3. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Thy last and fiercest strife is nigh;
The Father on his sapphire throne
Awaits his own anointed Son.
4. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die!
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, thy power, and reign!

Suggestions for your own prayers

Pray

- For the people of Myanmar, Syria and Northern Mozambique where internal violence and its consequences destroy lives, hope and prospects.
- For people in Australia affected by flooding.
- For peace on the streets of our cities, for police officers facing violent protest during a pandemic.
- For fairer availability of vaccines and for those producing, distributing and administering it.
- For those struggling with painful memories of personal loss after the anniversary of the first lockdown.
- For the protection and safety of women and girls at home and in public – for equality of opportunity, pay and treatment by the legal system.
- For school, college and university students, teachers and leaders as this difficult term ends - for rest, encouragement and confidence.
- For those known to you having operations and treatment this week; those in hospital or unwell.
- For ourselves - ask God for what you need today.

Lord's Prayer

HYMN – STF 272 ⁴

1. From heaven you came, helpless babe,
Entered our world, your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve,
And give your life that we might live.
*This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*
2. There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' He said.
This is our God, the Servant King
3. Come see his hands and his feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice;
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.
This is our God, the Servant King
4. So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone him;
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.
This is our God, the Servant King

Final Blessing¹

Jesus, we have walked with you this far. May we not abandon you as we walk with you in imagination into this Holy Week but stay by your side through your sorrow, that we might also join you for your resurrection morning. Surprise us on this journey, as we fix our eyes on you, author and perfecter of our faith. And may the love and blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be with us and all those we love now and always. Amen

Acknowledgements

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