

## **Sermon for Sunday 29 March 2026 – Palm Sunday**

**Revd Canon Simon Pitcher, Rector**

***Liturgy of the Palms: Matthew 21.1-11***

***Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50.4-9a, Psalm 31.9-16\*, Philippians 2.5-11, Matthew 27.11-54***

Please do be seated. In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

You'll understand that this week hasn't been the best week for writing a full sermon, so forgive me if this is only a few thoughts. But the thoughts that I'm going to share with you, I'm very grateful to Frank, who's at the back there. Good morning, Frank, who invited me to breakfast the other day to celebrate Eid and St Patrick's Day. And we spoke together in the café about Holy Week and what today is all about and what Jesus was doing riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. And there are a number of things. It's a cute, accessible image that Jesus, this wonderful man, should be riding a humble beast, a donkey. It's a very accessible image, isn't it, that we can warm to and which children love. But of course, Jesus wasn't just being cute.

Jesus was quite deliberately presenting a challenge to the politicians, the rulers of his own day, the rulers throughout history, the rulers of our own day, and a challenge to the religious leaders of his own day and the religious leaders throughout history. So he comes to Jerusalem as King and also as Priest, I think. So if we were to read in the Old Testament, in the second book of Kings, we'd read the story of Jehu, King Jehu. And he comes to liberate the people of Jerusalem from the evil empire that was ruling them at that particular time and to set the people there free, to liberate them. Right on cue, here comes Patrick the donkey.

So King Jehu arrived on a donkey in Jerusalem And all the people waved palm branches and spread their cloaks before him and welcomed him as the liberator, as the saviour. So when Jesus comes into Jerusalem riding on a donkey with the people waving their palm branches and spreading their cloaks before him, they're saying, "Here comes our king." And the king riding on a donkey comes as a symbol of peace. So they're welcoming him as a king of peace, riding on a donkey. And that would have, of course, been a challenge to the Romans. "Who does he think he is, coming here as a king?" It's a very deliberate, provocative statement. And, of course, the religious leaders too would have tipped off the Romans, "This guy thinks he's a king." And you'll remember later when Jesus was tried, the crowd that welcomed him were manipulated into crying out, "We have no king but Caesar." And over his head on the cross they wrote, "This is the King of the Jews." Mockery. So Jesus comes as King of Peace to challenge throughout history those who in power oppress, suppress, control, serve themselves. He comes to sprinkle into this world the values of the Kingdom of God.

So who really represents God in our world today? King Jesus or King Donald? Which would we say, where do we see the values of the kingdom of God? So Jesus comes for that reason. He also comes as priest. So 200 years before Jesus, Judas Maccabeus had led a revolt which had liberated the Jewish people, and he comes to Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Everybody laid their cloaks on the ground and waved their palm branches. And the first thing that Judas Maccabeus did in Jerusalem was go to the temple and cleanse it of all the things that were there that were unworthy of the worship of God. And Jesus comes on a donkey, and the first thing he does when the people have waved their branches and spread their cloaks, he goes to the temple and he cleanses it. "You have turned my Father's house into a robber's den," he says. So he reminds us that sometimes throughout history, people use religion and the name of God to control and manipulate and to get things wrong. And Jesus comes to show us truly what God is really like.

You might have heard the story in the news this week, the heart-breaking story of mothers in our own country who, after World War II, if they were unmarried mothers, had to give their babies up for adoption because it was morally wrong. Where did that moral come from, if not from a false kind of Christian morality that governed society at the time? Jesus would say no to that, cleanse that. That's not what God is like.

So the King who comes on a donkey as King and as Priest sets us free, liberates us. The word Hosanna, I think, means partly 'God save us.' And that reminded me, in talking to Frank, when the Berlin Wall fell, Gorbachev came to Berlin, and the East German government put on this big military procession and missiles and all that, and tanks, to show Gorbachev that they were in control. The country was bankrupt and falling apart. And Gorbachev heard people shouting, "Gorby, save us. Gorby, save us. Release us. Rescue us." And shortly after, the Berlin Wall fell, and the people were saved. That's what's going on when they shout, 'Hosanna!' when Jesus comes on the donkey. Hosanna! Save us! Rescue us! Free us! And so that's what he does on the cross.

The powers of this world think they can bury Jesus, bury God, crucify him, forget him, park him over there in the rubbish dump of Golgotha. But no, this time next week we will celebrate that nothing can separate us from the love of God. That sin, that death, corruption, power, all those things, Jesus defeats them, rises again, and sets us free in this world and in the next. In Jesus' name, Amen.