

Sunday Service: Sunday 5th April 2020

Good morning, to you wherever you are, whenever you have found the time to worship with us, and in what medium, paper, DVD or video stream. I trust that you are able to enter into this Spirit of Worship, despite the strangeness of these extraordinary circumstances we find ourselves in.

Now normally, I am very conscious of times, dates and calendars. My life is usually built around all these building blocks, so on a Sunday, I know for example, that I am looking to be at the church for around 9.45, the jobs I have to do, the preparation that is needed and ready to start at 10.30. Indeed, the fact that the clocks changed last week, nearly passed me by – except that there are those clocks in the house that automatically update and there are others that don't.

But in these times, where there is very little to differentiate the days, we can all easily lose track. I need to prepare well in advance, to produce and distribute resources and so the regular activities, the Sunday preaching for example, may well happen on a Thursday. But it is important, and I remind myself, that we remind ourselves that today, is Sunday, our first day of the week and a special day, set aside for us both to rest and to meet with our God. I heard of someone who got dressed up for last Sunday's Service and that is commendable that we take our meeting with God seriously, and don't just try to squeeze it in between Corrie and Eastenders.

And of course, our calendar is important too, today is Palm Sunday, the day in which we commemorate the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, which occurred at the start of that most holy, of all weeks. The week of His passion. So, we come together, individually and alone, yet in a sense together as one, to worship.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 95;

- 1 ¶ *Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*
- 2 *Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*
- 3 *For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.*
- 4 *In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.*
- 5 *The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*

6 *Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*

7 ¶ *For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

This Psalm, is a Psalm of David is appropriate to us today as we consider this shepherd king, particularly in His relationship with Jonathan and of course, in the context of Palm Sunday.

I recognise that last week's service was a little complicated, today will be much less so and our service is going to focus on three words; rejoicing, rejecting and returning as we parallel the events of 1Sam 18, with those of Psalm Sunday.

Our first song, this morning is that appropriate Robin Mark song, Behold He Comes. These are the days of Elijah.

Robin Mark – Behold He Comes (These are the days of Elijah)

You know that each Sunday, I try to take on separate themes, separate threads that run, usually parallel through scripture but as threads they are not parallel, although diverse they are never in isolation, and each compliments and corroborates the other. So, while we are most definitely NOT thinking of End Times this week, there is that prophetic element in Palm Sunday, that looks forward to THE Triumphant Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, when His feet will touch and split into two, the Mount of Olives. A time preceded as we have sung, by days of great trial, or famine and darkness of sword.

In among it all we are reminded that there is no one like Jehovah

Isa 40:18 ¶ To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?

In these darkest of days, may we too remember that there is no one like our Jehovah, there is none to compare with Him.

So, we will also think this morning, that although David was fresh from defeating Goliath, had developed a friendship with Prince Jonathan, there still was for him, days of great trial awaiting. And of course too, although we can see plenty of rejoicing and celebration on that first Palm Sunday, we recognise that this was for the Lord, the week of His rejection.

Anyway, good morning again, I trust that we are all safe and well and managing to keep our frustrations in check as we seek to heed all those necessary steps that have been

put in place with regard to isolating and distancing. Those frustrations when confronted with the empty supermarket shelves.

Let's pray together

Our God and Father, You are the God of all creation. This world and everything in it belongs to You, and we cannot help but wonder today what has become of it. We are all acutely aware of this pandemic around us, not just in the enforced changes it is making to our everyday lives but the suffering and the loss of life being experienced by many throughout this world.

Our Father we acknowledge and ask forgiveness for all our wrongs, for all those times we have felt that we know best and have disregarded Your teaching. In a world that seems broken, tarnished and lost, we understand that this finds its source in our lack of obedience and our self-will.

Our Father we understand You, through Your Spirit to be the God of all comfort and we pray Your comfort on all those who are suffering and grieving with a great sense of loss.

Father, we too are aware of many of Your promises made to protect and look after Your people and we would claim these promises for ourselves, help us who hold onto Your name to remain safe and well through these troubled times. Our Father heal the sick.

We too Father pray for our country and our leaders, guide them that lead us, that they do so wisely and prudently that we might see our way through this time and into more peaceful times.

We remember too at this time those who care for us, particularly the NHS workers, carers and communities nurses and those employed in the funeral services. For all our key workers we give thanks, and pray that they might find rest, and protection as they go about their duties, serving us.

And as we share some time together this morning, we pray our Father that it might be refreshing to us, an encouragement in these times of difficulties and that Our Father, there might be something for You in our worship, something that springs from our hearts.

For this we ask in Jesus name,

Amen.

Notices

I am proposing to have a “Zoom” Communion Service on Thursday, Maundy Thursday at 7.00 pm. This will be limited to the time restriction of the software to 40 mins. I will be sending a general email out through the usual channels, if you have not been in receipt of these please, and all the news such as it, make me aware and I’ll ensure that you are added to the list, receive these invites and all our news and updates.

As we shall see in a moment, we can through the technology have others take part in the service. And, as a starting point, Bible Reading spring to mind but if you want to make any contribution, the only requirement due of course to social isolation, is that you make a video of yourself and that can be done on most laptops / iPad / tablets these days.

Next Sunday, the second Sunday of the month, is Easter so I am not proposing to have a prayer focus. I will endeavour, and I don’t know with what yet, to make it appropriate to the occasion. Sunday afterwards, the 19th, scheduled to be Mark 3, the man with the withered hand, will be a time for prayer focus. I would therefore be delighted to receive, video prayers from yourselves that might be included. However, a word of caution, these services are designed for our own internal use, but it is not unfeasible that they could make their way into the public domain, and therefore we should be sensitive to personal details and confidentiality.

Further, there is a wide variety of worship materials on-line. I recommend spending a little time each day, that with our prayers we read some scripture and have a look at some YouTube Gospel songs. This will help with our patient endurance through these times. And on that note, should anyone wish any specific worship song to be played during this period, they only need to drop me a brief email, and I will try to include it, although I may defer this for a week or so, for a pertinent time for that theme. I am here to help facilitate your worship.

Our next song, is one that Chris Newton recently brushed down and brought off the shelf, it is the Lenny LeBlanc / Paul Balouche classic, Above all Powers, but before that, and through the wonders of technology Marion is going to bring us, our Bible Reading, picking up from the story of David’s defeat of Goliath, thank you Marion.

1 Sam 17 58 "Whose son are you, young man?" Saul asked him. David said, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

1 Sam 18 1 After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.

2 From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house.

3 And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.

4 Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

5 Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well.

6 ¶ When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes.

7 As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

8 Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?"

9 And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

10 The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand

11 and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

12 ¶ Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul.

13 So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns.

14 In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him.

15 When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him.

16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

Lenny LeBlanc – Above all powers

It is often said that as a society we like to build someone up, so that we can then enjoy watching them come crashing down, again. It is also said that there is nothing new under the sun. This our theme of rejoicing and rejection before the return to that which was promised for both David and the Lord.

Our reading starts with this theme of rejoicing.

David was riding the crest of the wave, he had defeated Goliath, had found support and even love and friendship in the palace. He had become best buddies with the king's son, which was hugely significant because if he David, was to take the throne, then the one who would really lose out, was Jonathan, the heir. In addition, he had the popular support of the crowds. They just loved him.

Had this been today, David would be on the cover of every popular magazine, he would be in the news and magazine shows on television and radio, documentaries would be made of his exploits and of course, he would be on Graham Norton, or for my generation; Parky or Wogan. I cannot over emphasis the greatness of his popularity, and no wonder, he had changed the country for the better, the threat of the enemy was abated, and Israel could enjoy a time of rest, prosperity and strength over its neighbours. These were for David, happy days.

A thousand years later, we see similar things being repeated in Jerusalem. Although Jesus didn't have the support of the politicians or high society he had public support and the ground swell was rising to the view, that this was their Messiah coming. The promised One of God, who would restore things to the way that God had intended. For no man spoke like him or did the miraculous works that he did.

Indeed Jesus was not only coming in the name of the Lord, He was acknowledged to be the son of David and this was not just in some ancestral way, although that was true too, but this was the to be the fulfilment in type, of all that David had achieved and all that Jesus was prophesied to do. This indeed was David's greater Son. He was to restore the nation of Israel, releasing it from Roman rule but more importantly for the Jews, to re-instigate the Mosaic style of worship, the priesthood and the temple, bringing in justice and joy. And why not, isn't the One of whom we have just sung

*Above all powers
Above all kings
Above all nature and all created things
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man
You were here before the world began
Above all kingdoms
Above all thrones
Above all wonders the world has ever known
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth
There's no way to measure what you're worth*

And here He was on Palm Sunday rightly being recognised as such, entering into Jerusalem, acknowledged as God's chosen, the very Son of God, and as such worshipped with rejoicing. The Jews, gathered in Jerusalem for their great feast of Passover, were anticipating great things. This Passover was their celebration, their remembrance of liberation from Egypt. Could it be, could it possibly be, that Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah was going to affect a same style liberation, but this time not from Egypt but from Rome. Their excitement, their rejoicing was palpable.

Initially, Saul was happy for David too, David was part of his entourage part of His court, and if the people were happy with David, they were happy with the court, they were happy with Saul. But the penny was to drop when they heard David being sung of, in terms that demeaned his achievements,

1Sam 18:7 As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

He, Saul was the king. He too had won many battles; he had been instrumental in bringing together the twelve tribes and making of them one nation. He was the king that the people had yearned for, and now David appears on the scene. Saul was afraid, not afraid per se, of David as a warrior, as the man who had defeated Goliath but rather afraid of what he represented.

By way of his own failures and inadequacies Saul had already been told by Samuel the prophet / priest that he, and his dynasty were to be rejected. Until now, these he felt were idle words, he felt safe and secure. He was in the possession of the palace, the crown and until now, public opinion. He did not know that Samuel had already anointed David to be king, but even still David was a threat to Saul's position, and he had to be

dealt with, the party for David was over. David was rejected and although we didn't read of it here, was in the interests of his health, having to self-isolate, or anyway something like that.

It is interesting to note that despite the schism between Saul and David, the fact that David was going to take the throne to which Jonathan was heir, their never abated. The Bible says, this

Pr 18:24 ¶ A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

There is an old hymn, which I couldn't see a decent enough version on YouTube to share with you, entitled The Crowning Day is Coming. It's lyric's start with these words.

*Our Lord is now rejected
And by the world disowned
By the many still neglected
And by the few enthroned*

As David was becoming more and more, persona non grata in the palace, so too during Holy Week was Jesus. Not initially, with the people but with the religious authorities, who continually disputed with Him and His interpretation of their perspective on the Law. He was not simply a thorn in their flesh but by His words and actions He was undermining everything they stood for, everything they had achieved. He was putting their very livelihood at risk. Of course, He was not their only problem, for they with the whole country, or region of Judea as it was wanting to rid themselves of Roman rule. Now in Jesus, one of them Caiaphas saw a way of solving both these problems.

Joh 11:50 Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."

Words that were to take on a strangely prophetic meaning as Jesus did indeed die for the people, though not of course as Caiaphas thought. This was to provide the catalyst that would see the crowds turn against Jesus, as the Priests and their Political entourage rejected His teaching His ways and of course rejected Him and brought the crowds alongside.

David's rejection, although a threat and constant threat on his life saw him estranged, ran out of town but no more. Of course, the Lord's rejection was much more, 700 years earlier Isaiah could say of Him.

Isa 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

And of course, that chapter goes onto detail, and that in quite some excruciating detail all that rejection would cost. The song, paraphrase's it thus.

Like a rose trampled on the ground

Discarded, trampled upon, totally disregarded, deemed to be worthless. We can see and understand this imagery, the people who had rejoiced at His entrance into the city earlier in that same week, now were treating Him with utter disdain. He was crucified and laid behind a stone and perhaps many thought, "that was that." His rejection was complete.

For David the question was never, would he return? It was always, when will he return. Samuel had anointed him as king, and he knew he would be king, and to far he seems to have had far greater patience than that I could ever have had. He had opportunities to kill Saul, and to claim the throne for himself but he would never as much as raise his hand against Saul, who he still regarded as being the "Lord's anointed."

Without David, Israel was a much weaker place and in due course, the Philistines again attacked and this time prevailed. Both Saul and his son Jonathan were killed on Mt Gilboa. On hearing this, David returns to Hebron where the men of Judah pronounce him as king, and slowly but surely, the country of Israel, which had been divided along tribal lines was united. The country of Israel, for a time at least increased in size, its borders were secure, its people prospered, David who had been rejoiced, rejected had now returned and had established his kingdom.

Jesus, trampled like a rose and hid behind a stone, was as we shall consider next Sunday, resurrected. The grave could not hold Him, and He gathered his disciples and apostles to give them evidence of his power over the grave and to instruct them on the proclamation of the good news. And of course, to re-assure them of His return. Then after 40 days he was taken up to heaven, waiting for the pre-determined time when He will return.

You see, the people that had rejoiced as they had welcomed into Jerusalem were not wrong. All they expected Him to be, in terms of His Messianic power and glory, He will be, His day as David's Greater Son is yet to be. It was just that, on that original Palm Sunday this not the time. That time is still anticipated and the more messed up this

world becomes, the more creation groans, the more we expect that day to ever draw closer,

David's return to Hebron and to the throne of Israel, is an insignificant picture but a picture nevertheless, of Jesus's establishing His kingdom on earth. In terms of peace, prosperity and justice. Jesus who had been rejoiced, and rejected will one day soon, and I believe more than ever, sooner rather than later, will return and establish His kingdom, on earth.

How then does all this fit in with our position? For many of us, there was that time when we rejoiced to bring Him into our lives. We proclaimed Him as the King of our lives, seating Him on the throne of our hearts and surrendering to His will. But as the days, week, months and years have rolled back, and while not directly rejecting Him, we have sought to take back a little more and more control. We have allowed ourselves to be guided by our own wishes, desires and purposes, while His will for us has faded into the background.

But if we are anticipating His return, to literally take the throne, then surely it behoves us to prepare ourselves, prepare our hearts in anticipation. This we can do by focussing more on Him, than on the distress all around.

We quoted the words of the old hymn ...

*Our Lord is now rejected,
And by the world disowned,
By the many still neglected,
And by the few enthroned;*

But they continue...

*But soon He'll come in glory!
The hour is drawing nigh,
For the crowning day is coming
By-and-by.*

Even so Lord God, speed the day, when He that shall come, will come and will not tarry.

Our Father God, we thank you for these thoughts from Your word. The One who was rejoiced and then rejected, will one day, and we pray very soon, will return. Our Father we look at this world in which we live, the mess we have made of it and we give thanks for this hope that we have within us, that He

will soon return, that we will be with Him and so begin that process of making everything new, again.

But until then our Father, this world is our home. We are exposed to all its failings and limitations. Our bodies are subjected to the things of this world, and so again we pray for your protection to be upon us. For those that suffer we pray for healing, and comfort for those that mourn.

Help us our Father to support and encourage one another, to build each other up at all times but especially in these sad and troubled times. Make each of us, in a very real sense, in these very unreal times, come to know in a new way, Your peace, that peace will pass all understanding, or as we might say, defies man's logic.

Bless each of us for good, as we ask this, giving thanks in the name of Jesus.

Our last song is one of these, of which there are becoming more and more, a hybrid of the old and new.

Casting Crowns – Glorious Day Living He loved me