

Message from the Vicar, Readings for Palm Sunday, Reflection by Reader Bill Pattinson. 5 April 2020

Dear Friends

Welcome to our weekly online update for Palm Sunday.

Please find below my message the Collect and Readings, a reflection by Bill Pattinson for this Sunday, and part 2 of an introduction to contemplative prayer. Our short reflective service for Palm Sunday, including a reading of the Passion Gospel from St Matthew by church members and Bill's reflection is available on our Facebook page.

Prayer and meditation

You may know that we were planning to hold an 'exploring prayer' morning at St David's last week led by Helen Friend and Alison Whiting. Helen has now provided part two of an introduction to contemplative prayer, which would have been part of our morning together.

Phone Networks

I hope that many of you will have had contact with each other through phone calls. Howard has been set up a network for St David's Church with me and Michael's network is also getting established. If would like to be phoned by someone and haven't yet had any contact please let me know at nigel.guthrie1@gmail.com

Magazine

Our magazine team has produced an entirely online magazine for April with some brilliant content. I hope you will receive and enjoy! It can also be accessed through our websites.

Live Prayers

I will continue to stream some short prayer services during the week on our Facebook pages:

On 'St David's Church Exeter' page:

Sunday at 9.30am, Tuesday, Thursday at 9am and

Good Friday at 10am – A Good Friday Liturgy

On 'Friends of St Michael's' page:

Wednesday Angelus and Mattins (BCP) at 9am

I also plan to stream a simple Easter Day Eucharist from the Vicarage at 9.30am.

Music

If you would like to hear some sacred music from our churches please go to YouTube and search for the names of our churches and you will find a number of recordings including quite a selection uploaded by Nigel Walsh.

Your Prayers are asked for

Rosemary Willcox, Charles Argle, Roger Beer, Janine, Caroline Speed-Andrews and her sons Charles and Simon Speed-Andrews, Claude and Gillian Harbord, Elizabeth Hewitt, James Tyler and Maurice Wright.

And for all those suffering from the symptoms of Covid-19 and those who are feeling lonely or afraid.

For the family and friends of Mark Knowles (whose funeral is on Maundy Thursday).

In the Parish Cycle of Prayer we pray for our PCC, St David's and St Michael's Committees, our Church and Chapel Wardens, Treasurer and Secretaries – with huge thanks for their hard work on our behalf.

Please also pray for the Samaritans whose workload is increasing, also hospital chaplains and their frontline witness, alongside the clergy in general, and everyone engaged in battling the virus in whatever way and especially for those working in the NHS, Social Care and in our emergency services.

A blessing for you and your homes

**Christ crucified draw you to himself,
to find in him a sure ground for faith,
a firm support for hope
and the assurance of sins forgiven;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be among you and remain with you always. Amen**

Thank you to everyone who is supporting and praying for our ministry.

May God keep you in peace and good health,

Nigel Guthrie

Collect

**Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ**

to take upon him our flesh
and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings for Palm Sunday

The Palm Gospel – Matthew 21: 1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, “The Lord needs them.” And he will send them immediately.’ This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

‘Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

‘Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’

The Old Testament Reading Isaiah 50: 4-9a

God has given me the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens—

wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

The Lord God has opened my ear,

**and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards.
I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.**

**The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
It is the Lord God who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?**

The New Testament Reading – Philippians 2: 5-11

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form, he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.**

**Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen**

**The Passion Gospel - Matthew 26: 14 – 27: 66 is read dramatically during
St David's Church Facebook page Service.**

Reflection by Bill Pattinson

On Matthew 21:1-11 (Palms);

and Dramatic Reading of the Passion according to Matthew

Prayer

(Holding Palm Cross)

Each Palm Sunday as we enter our churches we are given a Palm Cross. At the beginning of the service we hold up our Palm crosses to be blessed. Then joyfully we may process around the church holding our crosses high singing “All glory, laud and honour” or perhaps “Ride on, ride on in majesty.” We may even go out into the streets singing our praises. I well remember one Palm Sunday processing all the way down to St Michael’s to join our friends there. This year of 2020 it is totally different. No Palm crosses, no procession. Our church buildings are locked and empty; our car-less roads and quiet streets are almost silent. For fear of being struck down by a virus we are self-distancing, self-isolating, in partial lockdown or even in complete quarantine.

The Palm and the Cross symbolising life and death. On that first Palm Sunday Jesus rode into Jerusalem to be greeted by a crowd full of life, throwing their cloaks on the ground in front of him, cutting down palm branches to place amongst them. Here was a man of great importance, a prophet even. “Hosanna to the Son of David” shouted the crowd racing in front of him - it was as if the stones of the streets themselves were shouting out. Here was the King who would set his people free, free from Roman occupation, free from paying taxes, free to live life as they wished. Yet Jesus knew this was not the reason for his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. He was in Jerusalem for an entirely different journey, which just five days later would lead to the cross, to his crucifixion and his death.

So perhaps this coming Holy Week as we follow Jesus to the events of his Last Supper, through his agony and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, to his mocking and humiliation; as we follow his staggering legs up the hill of Golgotha and witness the pain and horror of his crucifixion we will see our Lord’s road to the cross with different eyes. We too may be nearing our Good Friday in our concern of being arrested by a virus, in the restrictions of our own isolated lives, in our anxieties for our own and loved ones’ safety, in our horrors of the statistics of those with the disease and those dying, in our disbelief of a global lockdown of life in a pandemic of Biblical proportions. But there is hope; there is good news for our Lord’s Good Friday was followed by Easter Sunday and his resurrection.

In this darkness of our lives so many lights of Christ are shining; so many beauties of God’s world are given a different meaning. As I look out of my study window to the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin here in Silverton, the primroses have never seemed so yellow among the gravestones. Spring this year appears much more verdant, the daffodils and tulips much more colourful. In that strange eerie silence we hear the bird songs so clearly as if for the first time. There seems to be a new recognition of value and worth for those who often work for the smallest wages - for all those who cannot work at home. Social media reports of so many hosannas - the paramedic applauded by the whole of her street as she went off to work;

the joy of organised social distance dancing at 11o'clock each morning and seemingly the whole country coming out to applaud the NHS workers one evening at 8 o'clock. In the midst of death and destruction, it seems we have never been more alive. The love Christ showed in his crucifixion is being also shown in the actions of so many - their sacrifice will shine for many years! Hosanna! And there will be an Easter to this crisis, a resurrection which we shall surely celebrate.

What seems many Palm Sundays ago, this cross I hold we used during our time of prayer. We were asked to write the word "courage" along the crossbeam and above and below it two thoughts for prayer. The crosses were brought to the altar and blessed. At the end of the service we took someone else's cross home. As well as courage, much needed at the moment, family, poverty and inequality have been added to this cross. Still so appropriate. Peter Atkinson, the Dean of Worcester, suggests in his Palm Sunday reflection, we can make our own palms. It doesn't need to be worked into a cross - just a piece of greenery, some foliage, something from your garden. He suggests we use that Palm to remind us daily of Jesus, our Christ and King. I suggest that after we have lit our candles at seven this Palm Sunday, we go out into our streets with our homemade Palms and shout "Hosanna" for all those working to save lives and all those keeping our lives going. Surely in their love and commitment, there is Christ. Hosanna!

Bill Pattinson

05.04.2020

Contemplative or Centring Prayer – part 2 by Helen Friend

'Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace'.

(The Message: Matthew 6:6)

Some people find focusing and contemplation in their mind easy and it seems to come naturally to them. Others, I suspect most of us, struggle to settle, quickly becoming bored or distracted; wanting to get up and do something else, all sorts of thoughts buzzing or drifting into our minds.

Having had a week to have a practice at becoming aware of your physical body. We add on the mind part of sitting in silence.

'Centring Practice is a practice in letting go of thoughts, one after another, after another. Our thoughts are habitual and repetitive. Each thought an opportunity to return to God'

(Richard Rohr).

Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed and sit upright on a chair.

Better to sit so you don't fall asleep.

Close your eyes.

Starting with your feet become aware of where they are, wriggle and relax your toes.

Move up to your knees; be aware of the chair under your bottom and thighs.

Let your hands, elbows, shoulders drop, keeping your back upright

Let your face, cheeks, tongue go soft.

Be aware of your breathing. Aim to do so down at your diaphragm feel your tummy go gently in and out.

Focus on this for a bit. Breathing in and out through your nostrils.

Try taking in breath to a count of 7

Then letting the air out for a count of 11

(The count doesn't matter but try and make the 'out' breath longer than the 'in' breath)

Some people prefer to use a word rather than count with the breathing

Eg: Jes - us or Ya – weh still with a longer out breath

Now register what sounds you can hear around you.

Acknowledge them and let them be.

Look into your mind still focusing on your steady breathing.

You will probably find thoughts keep coming into your mind and distracting you.

If so a couple of things to try:

Imagine yourself sat on a plateau looking out across a landscape.

When you find a thought coming into your mind, acknowledge the thought and place it somewhere on the landscape and leave it.

Return to your breathing and silence.

Or

Imagine a river and place any thought as it comes into a boat and push it off onto the water and return to your breathing.

Don't set yourself a strict time to do this for, but stay there 'a bit longer than is comfortable in your mind but not as long as you think you ought to'.

Like all habits it takes practise to learn, but daily is a good place to begin.

Contemplation does not replace prayer but supplements it.

'The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me: my eye and God's eye are one, one seeing, one knowing and one love'.

(Meister Eckhart)

Finally a meditation, from the American author Francis J Roberts

If I chose to hide you away, it is for a reason.

I have brought you to this place.

Drink in the silence. Seek solitude.

Listen to the silence.

It will teach you. It will build strength

Let others share it with you.

It is little to be found elsewhere.

Silence will speak more to you in a day than the world of voices can teach you in a lifetime.

Find silence. Find solitude – and having discovered her riches, bind her to your heart.