**Cranmer Group Sermon Transcripts & Prayers**

**Sunday April 5th – Palm Sunday**

**Rev. Tim Chambers**

**“Who Is This?” (Psalm 118:1-2 & 19-end, and Matthew 21:1-11)**

*For those of you who downloaded this transcript from the Cranmer Group website on the first Sunday of our podcasts, or who received a paper copy from your friends and neighbours, you’ll realise that I have adapted slightly the format for this week, Palm Sunday. I follow directly the sequence of the podcast, so we open in prayer; then have our readings; then the sermon; finishing with intercessions, the Lord’s Prayer, and a closing blessing. I hope that you enjoy this ‘virtual act of worship’ – please do contact me at* *curate@stgilesparish.com* *or on 07946 526569, should you have any comments, or wish to take me up on the invitation I make in my sermon.*

*I have also included some notices on the final page, about Holy Week online resources, and also how you can obtain consecrated bread and wine for Easter Day Holy Communion.*

*Thank you, stay safe, and God bless,*



**Rev. Tim Chambers
Vicar, the Cranmer Group**

**The Collect for Palm Sunday (Common Worship)**

True and humble king,
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
grant us the faith to know you and love you,
that we may be found beside you
on the way of the cross,
which is the path of glory.
**Amen.**

**First Reading: Psalm 118:1-2 & 19-end (New International Version)**

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

2 Let Israel say:
‘His love endures for ever.’

19 Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

20 This is the gate of the Lord
through which the righteous may enter.

21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

22 The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

23 the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes.

24 The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.

25 Lord, save us!
Lord, grant us success!

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
From the house of the Lord we bless you.

27 The Lord is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will praise you;
 you are my God, and I will exalt you.

29 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:1-11 (New International Version)**

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, ‘Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.’

4 This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

5 ‘Say to Daughter Zion,
“See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”’

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’
‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’
‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’

11 The crowds answered, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.’

**Sermon**

Today is Palm Sunday. One of the central days of the Christian calendar. We can tell just *how* important a day it is, since Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, which we mark today, is one of the few episodes in his life and ministry that occurs in all *four* Gospels.

Thankfully, this year, the account we’re following is from St. Matthew. Last year we had Luke’s version, which - unlike the other three Gospels - makes no mention of branches or palms whatsoever. Just cloaks being laid on the ground before Jesus, as the crowds salute his entry. “Cloak Sunday”, however, sounds rather less good…

Jesus had been away from Jerusalem; preaching, teaching and healing almost exclusively in Galilee - far to the north of the political and economic centre of the Holy Land. Many people had gathered around Christ as he did this – just before today’s passage, as he heals the sight of two blind men at Jericho, we’re told that “a large crowd followed him.” By today’s episode, in fact, this crowd has become “very large” – in some translations “huge”. Momentum is with Jesus, as he heads towards the capital.

He’s going up to Jerusalem along with many thousands of his fellow Jews, to celebrate the festival of Passover. It was the climactic moment of the Jewish year, especially in this time of brutal Roman occupation, when many Jews were seeking a new prophet to lead them from this new captivity; to be once again a free people in their Promised Land.

It’s into this turbulent mix – what the theologian Tom Wright, drawing parallels with the film of a few years ago, calls “a Perfect Storm” – that Jesus heads, with thousands of other Jews, towards Jerusalem. As Wright also says, rather portentously, “This is no time to be out on the sea in an open boat. Or riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.” But that, of course, is precisely what Jesus does.

And as Christ enters the city, accompanied by this “huge crowd”, the people of Jerusalem, who maybe haven’t heard about all the commotion that’s been going on in distant Galilee, ask those surrounding him, “Who is this?”

“Who is this?”
“Who is this man?”
“Who is this Jesus?”

The answer to this question now – to us, today – is as important as it was to the men and women crushed together in the narrow streets of Jerusalem, almost two thousand years ago.

And the answer to this question is threefold. First – and both this question and its direct answer are given *only* in Matthew’s account – the crowds following Jesus answer the people of the city: “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” This declaration is a double challenge to the citizens of Jerusalem: Jesus is both a “prophet”, one whose divinely-given authority would automatically challenge Jerusalem’s religious establishment. And he’s from Galilee, a faraway backwater. Who from there could possibly have the gall to take on the capital’s Temple authorities?

Secondly, the answer to the Jerusalemites’ question is found in the shouts of the Galilean crowd, as they escort Jesus towards the city:

‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’
‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’
‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

“The Son of David”; “He who comes in the name of the Lord”. This is an open claim to *kingship* for Jesus; to the throne of King David, the high-point of kingship in Israel’s tradition.

We see, too, that the phrase “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” is taken directly from our first reading, Psalm 118. The crowd reinforces the link with King David, by directly quoting from the Psalm, traditionally written by David himself.

And “Hosanna!” – meaning ‘Save us now!’ Jesus’s followers appear to be declaring that he’s the Messiah; the one who’ll deliver the people of Israel from their Roman oppressors.

This interpretation’s reinforced by the third element of the answer to the crowd’s question, “Who is this man?” In *all* of the Gospel accounts, not just here in Matthew, Jesus consciously and explicitly - through his actions as he approaches Jerusalem - positions himself as fulfilling Biblical prophecy relating to the Messiah, the one who’s to come and save the people of Israel.

In requesting his disciples to locate a donkey and its colt for him, and then riding upon them into the city, Jesus knows that the people will recognize this gesture as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah, chapter 9, verse 9:

“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.”

Jesus is declaring to the crowds, *through* his actions, that *he himself* is therefore King over Israel; that *he’s* the one come to challenge the authority of both the Jewish religious authorities, and their Roman overlords; *he’s* the heir of the throne of David.
*He* is the one who fulfills God’s purposes.

And yet, of course, Jesus comes as nothing like a conventional King. In Ancient Rome, a ruler entering his city as a conquering hero would do so proud & erect on horseback, not swaying on a donkey. The Kingship of Jesus looks not one bit like this.

The preacher and writer, J. John, summarises Jesus’ view of himself under four images, to which Christ referred time and again in his three years of public ministry, and about which he’s making a very public statement in his entry to Jerusalem.

J. John says that Jesus saw himself as:

• Royal Rescuer;
• Loving Leader;
• Perfect Provider; and
• Suffering Servant

Jesus is the one who comes to rescue his people; the Messiah – but not *only* for Israel, but for *all humanity*.

He’s the one who refers to himself as ‘the Good Shepherd’, caring for his flock so deeply that he’ll leave the ninety-nine, to go after the lost one.

He’s the one who refers to himself as “the Bread of Life” without which we cannot be filled, or fulfilled; the Light of the World that casts out all darkness; the vine, without connection to which we, the branches, cannot bear good fruit in our lives.

And Jesus is the one who, in perhaps the most striking image of all, is the servant king; the one who suffers for the sake of those who follow him, even as far as death on the cross.

So within this morning’s reading, there are contained three answers to the question, “Who is this?”

• The crowd’s direct answer;

• What the crowd’s proclamations about Jesus say about him; and

• What Jesus’s prophecy-fulfilling actions tell the people of Jerusalem.

I’d like to suggest to you all that there’s a parallel between how, *in Matthew’s Gospel*, the question “Who is this?” is answered in these three ways, and how the *same* question is asked, and how *we* may respond to it, today.

It’s as if we who recognize and follow Jesus are like those Galileans, heading up to Jerusalem in the group around him. And the world, those who don’t yet know Jesus; who don’t recognize him, and perhaps – in our increasingly secular world - have never been told about him; or have never known a Christian; or maybe have never even been into a church; well these people are like the inhabitants of Jerusalem, asking “Who is this?” “Who is this Jesus?”

And I suggest, too, that we have the same three types of answer to give to the world, as are given in the Gospel account.

Like Jesus’s Galilean followers, we can give the direct, challenging answer: “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee”; “This is Jesus; the Son of God.”

Or we can be ready to answer others’ questions about him through the words of the Scriptures, drawing upon them to lay before the sceptical, the evidence for Jesus’ claims, that come through his words, actions and miracles in the Gospels.

Or, finally, as Jesus did in his prophetic actions, we can show those who ask this question, the answer through what we *do*; through *how* we live our lives. Fulfilling the call to live as followers of Christ, as we see it laid out in Scripture. Living *distinctively* and *prophetically* compared to the world around us.

Just as the people of Jerusalem two thousand years ago asked, “Who is this?” so people around us today, have this same question: “Who is this Jesus?”

Perhaps especially now, at this time of such challenge and uncertainty, fear and grief, we as followers of Jesus Christ have an even greater opportunity to witness to our faith; and to him. How “this Jesus” has the capacity to transform the lives of those who let him in.

If that’s you, today, listening to this podcast or reading this transcript; if you’re asking the question, “Who is this Jesus? And why should I care?” then you’re so welcome to pick up the phone to me, or email me, and I’ll do my best to help you find answers, and hopefully discover that inviting Jesus Christ into your life is the best decision you could ever choose to make.

And if you’re already a follower of Jesus Christ, I have a challenge for you this morning. Our world, especially at this time of crisis, has never had a greater need of the redemptive love of Jesus Christ; and of the comfort & peace we find in him.

So I encourage you, today, to have the courage – hard as it can be to do so – to share our faith and what it means to us; in witnessing to Jesus. If you’re very bold, you could share it in a direct conversation with someone about Jesus, & the difference he makes in your life. Or perhaps you could draw alongside someone you know who’s been interested in your faith, and read together the teachings and miracles of Jesus in the Gospels

Or - perhaps most easily at the moment – I encourage you to share your faith by living out your life in a distinctively Christ-like way. There are so many instances we see at the moment of huge need; of hardship, and pain, and grief; so many ways for us, through our words and our actions, to ‘be Jesus’ to our neighbours and friends. Through checking regularly that they’re OK; through doing their shopping; through calling them for a chat if they are self-isolated and lonely. Through - God forbid - supporting them in grief. / Be Jesus to them.

I’m not sure, given current logistical difficulties, how many of you will have been able to receive a palm cross this year. I hope that very many of you will, through the efforts of our wonderful church family. These crosses remind us of this episode in Jesus’ final days; his entry into Jerusalem; his kingship, his sacrifice and his ultimate victory.

I don’t know what you normally do with *your* palm cross. But this year, if you do have one, don’t just pop it to one side! Put it somewhere prominent. In normal circumstances, I’d say put it on your car dashboard, but most of us are only driving once in a blue moon at the moment. So perhaps put it in your window; maybe right next to your front door; as *prominently* as you possibly can. But wherever you put it, I encourage you to place it more boldly than you’ve done in the past. And if you haven’t managed to get a cross this year, but still have last year’s at home, get that, and do exactly the same with it – be bold!

And, as we all go about our lives over this coming Holy Week – strange as our circumstances are - use your palm cross as a *prompt* to challenge you to be bolder in your witness to others.

*We* know “who this is”. *We* who follow him, know the difference the love and peace and grace of Jesus Christ make in our lives. Let’s all make sure *we* share this life-changing knowledge with those around us who still ask today, like those in Jerusalem, 2,000 years ago, “*Who* is this?” / In Jesus’ name, Amen.
**Intercessions for use during this Coronavirus outbreak**

Let us pray to God,
who alone makes us dwell in safety:

For all who are affected by coronavirus,
through illness or isolation or anxiety,
that they may find relief and recovery:
Lord, hear us,
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

For those who are guiding our nation at this time,
and shaping national policies,
that they may make wise decisions:
Lord, hear us,
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers,
that through their skill and insights
many will be restored to health:
Lord, hear us,
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

For the vulnerable and the fearful,
for the gravely ill and the dying,
that they may know your comfort and peace:
Lord, hear us,
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.
Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**The Collect for Palm Sunday (Book of Common Prayer)**

Almighty and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**A Closing Blessing**

May Christ, who accepted the cup of sacrifice
in obedience to the Father’s will,
keep you steadfast
as you walk the way of the cross
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Leading up to Easter, our Bishop, Paul Williams, and his wife, Sarah, will daily upload to YouTube a short message, including a Psalm, a short thought and a prayer. Each message will be available to watch live at 9AM on the Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham’s YouTube channel, or for you to catch later:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/dioceseofsouthwell/featured>

A range of online services, reflections and meditations, including Holy Communion (both Common Worship and Book of Common Prayer) will be available from the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham throughout Holy Week, led by the Bishop, the Dean and various Diocesan and Minster clergy. Details are at:
<https://southwell.anglican.org/churches-livestreaming-services/>

Leicester Diocese’s Launde Abbey has made available The Way of the Cross, a free online retreat for Holy Week, at:
<https://laundeabbey.org.uk/laundeathome/holy-week-2020/>

And, finally, consecrated Holy Communion bread and wine will be available for Easter Sunday. Do please let your Church Wardens know well in advance if you would like these, and they will arrange for you to receive them, whilst maintaining social distancing!