

**Opening Music:** 'Eternal Forest' by Graeme Kin 5:58 mins

**The Welcome :**

Thank you all for springing forward and getting here on time!

Welcome to you all, those of you here in the church and all of you Zoomers joining us online; and those who might later be watching the recording on You Tube.

You are welcome here just as you are, whatever your beliefs . Christian or non-Christian, whatever your religion, or even if you have none; we welcome everyone to this church.

**Opening Words:**

Today is Palm Sunday the start of Passion or Holy Week in the Christian Calendar.

I was thinking of what Palm Sunday means to me, then remembered a Palm Sunday from my childhood.

I don't know how old I was at the time, but I must have been under ten. I was living for a short time with my maternal grandparents and my aunt Susan. Susan is my mother's youngest sibling and is a mere six months older than me, so when we were younger we were often taken to be sisters.

I believe my father had been temporarily laid off work, and so to make ends meet my grandparents had taken me in. I attended school with Susan, and as Susan and my grandmother were practising Catholics, I used to sometimes go with them on a Sunday to the Catholic church.

I don't remember much about the services except that I never really got the hang of what we were supposed to do; when to stand, kneel or sit. My grandmother however did tell me off when I once turned my back to the altar!

I was told that I wasn't allowed to go up to the front for wafer and wine. I did feel quite jealous because Susan was going to Sunday School but I wasn't! She had been given a little picture stamp album and each Sunday she was given stamp-like pictures to stick into it.

I had been baptised, like my mother, in a Church of England for my maternal grandfather was baptised C of E. He and my grandmother married in a Church of England, but she never did give up her Catholic faith. However I knew that my parents didn't want me to become a Catholic!

I knew it was wrong to be jealous, but it seemed that the Catholic Church was richer and rewarded you for attending church and for being good.

One Sunday as it was Palm Sunday, I, like everyone else was given a cross made out of a palm leaf. I cherish that palm cross to this day, and keep it in my little King James Bible.

As children Easter didn't beat the joy of Christmas, but never the less we had a holiday from school and were given new clothes and lots of Chocolate Easter eggs.

I never did get to believe that Jesus had; after being nailed to a cross, come back from the dead.

That God was his father or that there was such a thing as a Holy Ghost or spirit!

I do however believe in what Jesus preached and during this service I will use many of his words that are quoted in the Gospels of the New Testament.

## **Chalice Lighting:**

And now, as is our custom, let us begin this time of prayers, music and contemplation by lighting our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith.

Zoomers If you have a candle at home perhaps you would like to light it now.

Chalice Prayer : 'Palm Sunday' by the Unitarian Reverend Cliff Reed

We light our chalice with a memorial flame,  
For today we remember Jesus:  
His fateful ride into Jerusalem,  
The suffering and death that awaited him.  
The flame burns too for all who have taken the same road.  
May our worship do them justice and strengthen us to follow them.

## **1st Hymn:**

**Sing your Faith' (aka 'Purple Book') 177 'To you who would as pilgrims go'**

To you who would as pilgrims go  
with eager steps and hearts aglow,  
when on the holy city bent  
be not deterred from high intent.

For people need triumphant days  
with ample reassuring praise,  
and palms extol while thorns do not –  
and none would choose the martyr's lot.

So easy now to join the throng  
with flowering branch and palm and song.  
So hard to see on such a day  
the beggar's hand beside the way.

How fine to do the pleasant deed,  
to serve the current favoured need,  
but hope needs those who think and choose –  
uphold a cause they may well lose.

For those who would as pilgrims go  
both scorn and failure well may know,  
and high intent can lead to pain  
and gifts must never be for gain.

*Music 'Church Triumphant' James William Elliott, 1833 - 1915*  
*Words © Janet H. Bowering. used by permission.*

## **Palm Crosses:**

I've bought some palm crosses in :

These were made in Tanzania in Africa and are sold all around the Christian world.

The African Palms Project was started in 1965 by Father Alan Talbot an Anglican Priest who served for 6 years as a missionary in the diocese of Masasi.

The main aim of the project was to give local villagers a chance to earn some extra money to supplement their meagre income whilst retaining their dignity, giving them the ability to carry on with their farm work.

The Palm Crosses are made from the dried branches of a particular dwarf palm. The Green Team will be pleased to know that these grow wild in the Masasi area so are not cultivated or chemically treated, no trees are cut down in the work of collecting the palm leaves for plaiting.

All profits are used by the Charity for Education and Healthcare. Their projects have included clean water supplies for the Palm Cross villages.

Please feel free to come up now and take one.

### **1st Bible Reading:**

I will be using three versions of the Bible during this service.

The E.S.V. or English Standard Version, first published in 2001, the N.I.V. or New International Version first published in 1979, and the oldest, King James Bible which was first published in 1611. All New Testament translations are of course from the original Greek.

The story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is one of the few incidents in the life of Jesus that appears in all four gospels. It's often quoted from the gospel of Matthew, for Matthew's account of the life of Jesus is the most Comprehensive.

Jesus' purpose in riding into Jerusalem was to claim himself as their Messiah and King of Israel, to fulfil the prophecy in the Jewish Bible. In the King James Bible Matthew in his gospel quotes from the Jewish book of Zechariah which reads: "Lo, your King comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." But in Matthew's gospel it reads "behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass and on a colt, the foal of an ass"

This has caused some confusion as it sounds like Jesus is on a donkey and it's foal at the same time!

In the latest version the English Standard Version, as you will hear, even this version does not clear up the confusion!

Matthew Chapter 21 Verses 1 -17 in the English Standard Version 'The Triumphal Entry'

' Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front 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, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'

Which seems to clear up the confusing until you read further :

'The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of

David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers'

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?"

And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there."

### **The Address :**

Palm Sunday is the commemoration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and marks the beginning of Passion or Holy Week; what most people now call Easter. This is when Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified.

Orthodox Christians consider this and Ash Wednesday to be the two most important Mass' in the Christian Calendar. Ash Wednesday is the start of the pre-Easter fast called Lent. Palm branches from the previous year are burned to create ashes which are then applied to the forehead in the shape of a cross.

Palm Sunday is the last Sunday in Lent and Maundy Thursday ends the fast.

On that first Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a borrowed donkey, (and /or her colt, depending on which account you read) one that had never been ridden before. The disciples spread their cloaks on the donkey for Jesus to sit on, and the people came out to welcome him, laying before him their cloaks, and branches of palm trees.

This appears to fulfil the prophesy in the Jewish Bible. In Jewish tradition there were two occasions when the waving of palm branches was customary. The Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot which commemorates the dwelling of the Israelites in the wilderness during their 40 years fleeing from slavery in Egypt; this occurs late in the year, or the triumphant return of a King or military leader.

The gospels point out that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem took place during the Passover Feast in the spring so the waving of palm branches for him falls into the second category.

Unfortunately, the praise most of the people lavished on Jesus was not because they thought of him as their saviour from sin. They welcomed him out of their desire for the Zion King, the Messiah, the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation, prophesied throughout the Jewish Bible. Someone who would lead them in a revolt against Rome, for at that time Judea was an occupied Roman Province. These were the ones who hailed him as King with their many Hosannas, recognising him as the Son of David who came in the name of the Lord, but when he failed in their expectations – when he refused to lead them in a revolt against the Roman occupiers, the crowds quickly turned on him.

It also occurred the week of Passover, which commemorates the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Any attempt by the people to appoint their own King would have been seen as treason by the Romans. The Temple officials had an agreement with the Romans that if they helped keep the peace they would retain their wealth and status. The Jews in Judea were not fond of outsiders and Jesus is identified as from Nazareth in Galilee. Within just a few days, the Hosannas would change to cries of “crucify him”. Those who hailed him as a hero would soon reject and abandon him.

Jesus overturns the money-changer's tables in the temple and preaches about tearing down the temple. This was an offence, and in the eyes of the temple officials, Jesus was a threat to the peace. They seek a way to arrest him away from his followers and arrange with one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot to aid his arrest. The arrest takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is then handed over by the Jewish officials to the Roman procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate and tried in a Roman court of law and sentenced to death by crucifixion. Crucifixions were issued only by Rome for Roman Capital prisoners guilty of crimes against the government.

According to all four gospels, there was a prevailing Passover custom that allowed the procurator to commute one prisoner's death sentence by popular demand. In one such instance, the "crowd", "the Jews" and "the multitude" in some sources, are offered the choice to have either Barabbas or Jesus released from Roman custody. According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the account in John, the crowd chooses Barabbas to be released and Jesus of Nazareth to be crucified. What crime was Jesus put to death for? Above his cross they nailed a plaque “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” they also gave him a kingly crown, made out of thorns. Plaques above crosses were there as a deterrent, there to convey to the people the crimes that warranted such a ghastly fate.

## **2nd Group of Bible Readings taken from the New International Version:**

Matthew Chapter 26: Verses 14 – 16 'Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus'

'Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver.

From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.'

Matthew Chapter 26: Verses 69 – 75 'Peter Disowns Jesus'

'Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!”

After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.”

Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”

Immediately a rooster crowed.

Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.'

The story of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem is one of contrasts, and those contrasts contain applications to believers. It is the story of the king who came as a lowly servant on a donkey, not a prancing steed – not in royal robes, but in the clothes of the poor and humble, Jesus comes, not as a conqueror by force as earthly kings, but by love, grace, mercy and his own sacrifice for his beliefs.

Now a blessing before our next Hymn :

### **Holy Week – A Blessing by the Reverent Cliff Reed**

From raised hopes to disillusion;  
from fellowship to betrayal,  
from gentle triumph to brutal death;  
this is the drama of Holy Week.  
May we pass through it in full awareness  
of it's timeless truths, learning compassion  
and courage, trusting always that after  
darkness comes the dawn. Go in peace.

### **2nd Hymn: Hymn number 146 in the Purple Hymn Book "Speaking Truth in Love"**

Speaking truth in love, we gather  
to embrace the unity  
of earth's living systems, whirling  
towards God's perfect liberty;  
reason guided, conscience lighted,  
tempered with humility.

Speaking, one unto another,  
that which honours highest worth,  
and which for ourselves and others  
nurtures common life from birth;  
just, sustaining, fair society  
through the length and breadth of earth.

Speaking peace across this planet  
where all living things depend  
each on each, as with our neighbours,  
their diversity transcend.  
Honour prophets, honour Jesus,  
those who welcome God as friend.

*Music: 'Regent Square' Henry Smart, 1813 - 1879*

*Words: © Andrew M. Hill b. 1942 Used by permission*

### **3rd Bible Reading from the New International Version: Read by Sheila Evans**

Matthew Chapter 19 Verses 16 – 30 "The Rich and the Kingdom of God"

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?' 'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied 'There is only One who is good, if you want to enter life, keep the commandments. 'Which ones?' he enquired. Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother, and love your neighbour as yourself.'" All these I have kept, 'the young man said. 'What do I lack?'

' Jesus answered, "if you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

### **A Prayer of Meditation:**

For the beauty that awaits us at the turning of the road  
May there be within us the wonder and the welcome of the living soul

For the trials that await us may there be calm strength,  
Courage to trust when mists obscure the way,  
Faith to venture when the issue seems uncertain

For the call to helpfulness  
May there be quick sympathy and a ready response;  
May we find gladness on our way  
And the reassuring presence of helpers and friends;  
May we find grace generously to forgive  
And to seek or to work out our own forgiveness;  
May our desires be tempered to our needs,  
May we value and praise the simple and the lowly  
As well as the difficult and the unusual;

May humour and the gift of laughter be ours,  
May we be understanding, appreciative,  
Reverent in our relations one to another,  
Seeking to elicit another's best, and thereby our own.

Amen

### **Reflective Time / Music:**

We'll now have a short time (1:00 min) of reflection followed by a video

**"Living Prayer" by Alison Krauss 3:47 mins**

### **A Quote from 'A Little History of Religion' by Richard Holloway :**

'They came for Jesus in the middle of the night. That's when the secret police always come. When the city is quiet and human energy is at it's lowest, they strike. They arrested him in a private garden, led there by one of his own.

Jesus had been a master of the symbolic gesture. When he started his movement of spiritual liberation he echoed the entry of the Jewish people into Canaan. The Bible tells us that the Jews who fought their way out of Egypt into the Promised Land were divided into twelve clans, known as the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

So Jesus chose twelve men from among his band of disciples to help him lead his very different campaign. He called them apostles a Greek word that translates to messenger. Their message was the good news that God's kingdom of peace was at hand.

But the apostles were not an impressive bunch. The two most famous of them turned out to be failures, Peter and Judas. Peter was affectionate but weak. He deserted Jesus after he was arrested, but it was Judas who led the police to the place where Jesus was hiding. We're not sure why he did it. The priests paid him thirty pieces of silver for his betrayal, but it seems unlikely that he did it for the money. Maybe he was disappointed that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah he had expected. Jesus had an enormous following among the poor and oppressed in Israel, yet he hadn't taken up the sword against the Romans. Would a push provoke him to call them to arms to bring in the promised kingdom? Was that Judas's motive?

We don't know. Maybe he didn't know either. Matthew tells us that what happened to Jesus after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane broke Judas's heart and he hanged himself. It was too late to undo his action. By then Jesus was in the hands of the Roman soldiers.'

I'd just like to say at this point, that if you want to know the truth of any story or account of an event, especially if it occurred over two thousand years ago. It is important to read as many accounts as you can so you can make up your own mind on what is true or false.

### **Now a Story about 'The Cross on the Donkey's Back' :**

Although legends are not based on fact, they often become a part of the lore of the season and add special significance to it.

The Legend of the Christian Donkey or the Jerusalem Donkey from Nubia in Sudan has become a part of the story of Easter. The Nubian donkey has a cross on its back, because it was said that this was the ancestral breed that carried Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

According to the legend, the donkey knew that Jesus was facing a trial and much suffering. Seeing the tragic event of Jesus' crucifixion, the donkey wished that he had been able to carry the cross for Jesus and bear his burden. The donkey could not bear the sight of Jesus on the cross, he turned his head away and the shadow of the cross fell across his back and there it has remained as a reminder of the loyalty and humble love the donkey had for Jesus.

Each Nubian donkey's cross is slightly different, but each is defined by the cross they bear on their back.

There are several depictions of the story, but all ultimately have the same theme about the cross. Whatever your beliefs, it is a beautiful legend depicting how deeply emotional, sensitive and loyal donkeys are.....

A donkey was there at Jesus' birth and one or maybe two were there at his death!

## **Final Hymn: Hymn number 218 in the Purple Hymn Book “With Heart and Mind”**

With heart and mind and voice and hand  
may we this time and place transcend  
to make our purpose understood:  
a mortal search for mortal good  
of justice, freedom, peace for all.

A mind that's free to seek the truth;  
a mind that's free in age and youth  
to choose a path no threat impedes,  
wherever light of conscience leads.  
Our martyrs died so we could be  
a church where every mind is free.

A heart that's kind, a heart whose search  
makes love the spirit of our church,  
where we can grow, and each one's gift  
is sanctified, and spirits lift,  
where every door is open wide  
for all who choose to step inside.

*Music: 'Mach's Mit Mir, Gott'. J.H.Schein 1586 - 1630. Harmony J.S.Bach 1685 –1750*

*Words: ©Alicia S.Carpenter b. 1930. Used by permission*

### **A Prayer : The Peace Prayer of St. Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness light, where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

And now to bring our service to a close and lighten our mood, I will ask Gill to read us a poem about a donkey it's by an anonymous writer : The Poem is called 'Why Keep A Donkey!'

## **Why Keep A Donkey! Anon**

When your day seems out of balance  
And so many things go wrong -  
When people fight around you;  
And the day drags on - and on -

When parents act like children  
And everything goes wonky  
Go out into the pasture  
Wrap your arms around a donkey

His gentle breath enfolds you  
He watches with those eyes  
He does not have a PhD -  
But he is oh-so-wise!

His head rests on your shoulder  
You hold him very tight  
He puts your world in balance  
And makes it seem all right.

Your tears – they soon stop flowing  
The tension now has eased -  
The stress – it has been lifted  
You are quietly at peace.

So when you need respite  
From the turmoil in your day  
The best therapy ever -  
Is out there eating hay!

Thank you Gill

### **Now my Closing Words:**

Are we following Jesus' teaching when we covet those Easter eggs and new clothes? When we take pleasure in being given a Palm Cross on Palm Sunday or an album label for attending Sunday School.

Jesus said "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Let us receive humbly and give generously this Easter. Let us enjoy the holiday as a time of Spring and New beginnings, a time to enjoy being with family and friends.

The roots of Unitarianism are in Christianity, but the founders were branded as heretics because they

regarded Jesus of Nazareth as a human prophet rather than a divine being.

Many martyrs from all religions have sacrificed their lives for their beliefs.

To stand up for what you believe in, knowing that your actions are bound to lead to your arrest, and ultimate torture and death requires a courage few humans possess.

Whatever one's beliefs about what happened on that first Easter, the legacy Jesus left was an exemplary example of how inspiring is a life well lived. One could say that Jesus lives on

in the example he set us, in the inspiration which has come down to us over two thousand years.

Our world is not so different from the one in which Jesus lived – there is still wars, persecution, poverty, famine, disease and countless people fleeing them.

I'll close with words by the Unitarian Martyr Norbert Capek who preached religious freedom and died in the gas chamber at Dachau concentration camp in 1942.

'I have lived amidst eternity. Be grateful, my soul. My life was worth living. He who was pressed from all sides but remained victorious in spirit is welcomed into the choir of heroes. He who overcame the fetters giving wing to the mind is entering into the golden age of the victorious.'

**Extinguish Chalice :**

**Closing Music/Video :**

The closing video is a song that Sheila uses at the end of her monthly 'Oasis of Calm' . It is "Gaelic Blessing" By Sir John Milford Rutter who was born in 1945. He is an English composer, conductor, associated mainly with choral music.

**"Gaelic Blessing" By John M Rutter 1:54 mins**

**Find it here:** [V https://youtu.be/\\_8MKEpXqGko?si=mrByHlHzWnZ0dIDEideo](https://youtu.be/_8MKEpXqGko?si=mrByHlHzWnZ0dIDEideo)