

# Palm Sunday - Sunday 24th March 2024

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Date: 24 March 2024

Preacher: Dave Moss

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Welcome to Palm Sunday. And put a few palms up, you know, a few things, and then we'll come on to the mess in a bit later. So this is the Palm Sunday, the day we've almost lost.

We've almost lost it. And increasing numbers of people can't tell you what it's all about. Now, the past few times I've stood up here, I've looked at British culture and the changing face in this century.

It fascinates me to learn more about why we're gradually turning our backs on our Christian heritage. And in a survey done by Travelodge, of all people, they asked children what Easter was all about.

And nearly half, 48%, of British children are clueless about the true meaning behind the most important festival in the Christian calendar, Easter.

Over a third, 34%, of children think Easter is all about celebrating the birth of the fantasy character, the Easter Bunny. Whilst a quarter of children think that Easter is when chocolate eggs were first invented.

[ 1 : 16 ] And on average, children receive five chocolate eggs this Easter. However, six out of ten children reported they do not know why eggs feature Easter at all.

And 60% of children surveyed reported their families do not celebrate Easter. The survey also revealed that whilst the religious elements of the Easter festival are forgotten, bringing the family together over the Easter break is still important in modern Britain.

On an average, British parents will be splashing out to take a short break or day trips with their children this Easter, which in total will give the UK economy a boost of two billion pounds.

In 2017, a survey of adults showed that 55% of adults associated Easter with Jesus Christ. But this was only slightly more than those who associated it with the Easter Bunny, which is 49%.

And more important were chocolate eggs at 76% and a bank holiday at 67% and hot cross buns at 62%.

[ 2 : 29 ] So you can see how things are changing. It's little wonder that holidays, chocolate eggs and hot cross buns win out, as they are the more commercial value than a quiet, reflective time thinking about what God has done for us.

The Great Easter getaway is worth millions to the economy, and people are often found in airport queues rather than in church services. And Holy Week is fast becoming the week that is becoming slowly removed from the British culture.

Good Friday is almost forgotten by most. Shops are usually open. And although the banks are usually closed, well, with 24-hour online banking, you know, is that really the case anymore?

And Maundy Thursday is all but lost. People are usually happy with Easter Sunday, as it's a time perhaps for a family get-together and a great chocolate feast.

But Palm Sunday, well, it's just not there anymore. It doesn't fit in with people's thinking anymore. After all, it's just about waving a few branches, isn't it?

[ 3 : 42 ] That's what you do. And calling Jesus a superstar. But Palm Sunday is all about celebrating the coming Messiah.

If the king's coming to town, you get ready. And as our photo of last week shows, everybody is ready and prepared. So it was a really happy occasion with joy and excitement, and everyone was so delighted to see the king and queen here at St. John's.

As you can see, Matt's got dressed up for the occasion, which is most unusual. Bit of Photoshop does wonders, doesn't it? Can anyone spot the four edits of this photo?

Any offers? Matt, why? What's he done? He doesn't wear normal clothes. No, right, okay. Where's the other edit?

Ruth, yeah, she never turns up at anything, does she? No, that's right. Okay, and other edit? The sign, Charles and Camilla, correct. And the other edit? No, it's not the king and queen, it's the whole photo, yeah?

[ 4 : 57 ] Right, the king and queen are the normal bit. It's the rest of the photo. Anyway, there you go. Let's have a listen. So here goes from Jesus Christ Superstar, Hosanna.

Hosanna, hey, sana, sana, Hosanna. Hosanna, hey, sana, Hosanna. AJC, AJC, want you to fight for me?

Sana, Hosanna, hey, superstar. Sing, you song for nothing long. Sing out for yourselves, you are blessed.

There is no more you cannot wait for kingdom. The slow, the soaring, the quick, the day.

Don't have a listen. And the joy, the now, superpower. They know that you have to live for life.

[ 6 : 06 ] Oh, sons, Lord, ■ inte. Or, hunt■■■. In September, we find your family. Hey J.C. J.C., won't you die for me? Tell the whole family to the Lord.

I need to die to the Lord. Do you think you're the one who's here in your heart?

Andrew Lloyd Webber, when compiling this video, said, Hosanna is meant to be sung by the crowd. So thank you everyone for making Hosanna so joyous. And that's where we are today. We've been following the story of Peter as he journeys alongside Jesus.

This has produced many difficult times and decisions, but together with all the disciples and many of Jesus' followers, they see and feel and understand something different as they walk with him.

[ 7 : 15 ] As they follow, they believe and trust in Jesus more and more. Palm Sunday is now the day when the journey leads them to the very gates of Jerusalem.

Surely this is the climax of all that following. The culmination of what has happened so far, when Jesus will finally be acknowledged as king. And in our Lent course, we'll be looking at trees of life. And it's no surprise here that Palm Sunday and Holy Week has a focus on trees. Palm trees today, but also as we shall see later, to the dead wood of the cross, and finally to another garden on Easter Sunday, reminding us of the very place where it all started from in the Garden of Eden. And so what of Palm Sunday? The start of the most important week in the Christian calendar. Well, the journey starts from the Mount of Olives, one of the high places, again, that we've been talking about on our Lent course.

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany, at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden.

[ 8 : 47 ] Look, untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, Why are you untying it? Say, The Lord needs it. Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them.

As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, Why are you untying the colt? They replied, The Lord needs it. They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt, and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, rebuke your disciples.

I tell you, he replied, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out. As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes.

[ 10 : 25 ] The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls.

They will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you. When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling.

Ah! Ah! Damn it! God, forget the work. That's it. That's it. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It is written, he said to them, my house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.

[ 11 : 36 ] Every day, he was teaching at the temple, but the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the leaders among the people, and the leaders among the people, were trying to kill him. And the people, the people, were trying to kill him.

Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words. And so, the journey finally leads the disciples to Jerusalem.

They've arrived. They have come with their king. For them, Jesus could have easily stayed in Galilee. And enjoyed the continued success of his ministry there.

But, he had to address the center of power. Whose decisions and policies had such a brown defect on all people.

They've come to the seat of power, the power base of the religious authorities and the local power base of the Roman authorities. The disciples have every confidence in Jesus that things will change now.

[ 12 : 40 ] And they will, but not as they expect. Luke tells us, As they approached Jerusalem, Jesus looked over the city and wept over it and said, If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace.

But now it is hidden from your eyes. All is good as they walk towards Jerusalem. We're on our way. Jesus is coming to take power. However, the disciples thought that this was it. But it wouldn't be too long after the resurrection. They would truly understand the true significance of all of this.

He is to enter Jerusalem as king, as a conqueror, in anticipation of victory. And it's a parody, a parody of what Roman generals do.

They enter the city after victory is won. And the city is surrendered. And they have prisoners in chains behind them. That's what the Romans did.

[ 13 : 51 ] But Jesus celebrated this victory before the battle. And his released prisoners, his disciples, are following him. Jesus had come to make his kingdom known.

This is not a chance journey. This is a planned journey. And this is our journey too, which we so often miss. Because sooner or later, we will come face to face with those in power and authority. As many do today in different countries all over the world. Those in authority take note. God's kingdom is here.

Okay, we need a donkey. It's an unusual choice for a victorious leader. But the budget's tight. And I'm sure things will change once more people recognize him and the victory is achieved.

Here, God gives us a sign that he is in control. He sends two disciples off to find a donkey. And the donkey's ready. It's not a spectacular sign, but a sign nonetheless.

[ 15 : 05 ] Simply to show that wherever the journey may lead us, God is here traveling alongside us. Waving palm branches.

How unusual. The waving of palm branches is a sign of victory. This is the fulfillment of Zachariah's prophecy, where he speaks of the coming of Zion's king.

He is riding on an ass and the city's rejoicing. This is fulfillment of God's purpose. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna. The Hosannas are not merely a cheerful noise, but a cry to the Lord who is bringing us salvation. Hosanna means save now.

We would never, ever dream of wildly waving something around today, would we? You know, all that paparazzi.

[ 16 : 12 ] One minute, they can't get enough of you. And then, as we know, they often distort your image later and make you out to be somebody you're not. Do you see how very modern this story is?

Very, very modern. And Jesus is full of joy. His followers recognize him and proclaim him king.

He's not taken by surprise at this event. In fact, he's inspired by it. But he steps out into the open to show everyone who he is, the Messiah.

But wait. What's happening in God's temple? Traditionally, we celebrate this tomorrow.

So, if you're dropping, just be careful of the tables. That's all I can say. But what's happening in God's temple? It looks more like a supermarket than a place of prayer and worship.

[ 17 : 12 ] Jesus sees money changers dealing in temple tax, charging excursionate fees for animal sacrifices. And basically, pilgrims were being fleeced in the name of religion.

The poor were being excluded as they couldn't afford it. Jesus is angry because the scribes and Pharisees have commercialized and privatized the faith.

Religion can be sold as a consumer commodity. And we see that much of this, unfortunately, still exists today. People often complain that Christianity meddles too much in society and politics. But Christianity should be about spiritual matters and a private faith. That's what we're told. That's what it should be. However, Jesus seems to suggest that the danger lies in the opposite direction. We should never believe that God is concerned only with the religious. God is concerned with everyone and wants to include everyone and everything.

[ 18 : 17 ] So Jesus is angry because Israel's missionary call was being denied. The court of Gentiles, where the market is, was an area of the temple where people from different countries could come.

It was meant to provide some access for people of all nations into the holy presence of God. But now this had just become another money-grabbing opportunity.

Israel was supposed to be rooted in God, bearing much fruit for the benefit of all the nations. But instead, he finds fruit that's shriveled, rotten, and fit for no one.

Is this not the danger for us too? We become so self-obsessed with our little Christian communities that we fail to look outwards and to welcome the whole world of people around us and to bear fruit. I think people are surprised by this story, but Jesus confronts this betrayal of God with an act of civil disobedience. He's aware that the market will just come back, but nevertheless, he makes his protest.

[ 19 : 32 ] He disowns the abuse of a temple and makes people decide if they agree with him. His anger grew out of the decisions this Jerusalem community had made.

He's making them question the choices that they have made and the choices that people in power have made. Perhaps too often, we've come up with the excuse to do nothing in the face of injustice. We hold fast to the thinking that God has put in place all those in power and authority and ignore the fact that those in authority are also called to love and obey God too and hence be accountable. We're to challenge them when they don't act with love, grace, and justice. But of course, the authorities are watching. Unsurprisingly, this message is not popular with the ruling group. Who is this Jesus that he dares to question the status quo? The traditions, this very lucrative setup which keeps them in power and keeps the poor in their place.

[ 20 : 44 ] The traditions have taken over. The God of love is now far removed. Best dispense with this so-called king and all he stands for.

And we can be much the same. Best not give Jesus too much attention this Holy Week. It could be dangerous. We might have to take him seriously.

Let's just stick with hot cross buns and ice holiday and chocolate eggs. Let's have a nice time and not get too serious. But Jesus warns them that they have gone too far.

There are too many victims of their grip on power. He knows full well he'll be a victim himself of their power in the coming days. Jesus heals many people at this point.

Another sign that Jesus is the Messiah. The old regime is over. Everyone is welcoming God's kingdom from every nation whether blind or crippled.

[ 21 : 53 ] We know who the victims are in our own society. But do we see them as part of God's kingdom? We know who those in power are.

And they need to understand that they cannot suppress God's kingdom. This is not how it's supposed to be. As a French teacher, I've organized many school trips to France.

Usually 90 teenagers at a time on two coaches. Not all by myself by the way, with all the staff with me. And we used to go to Paris just before Easter and do things like, you know, Euro, Disney, the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre.

And on some occasions, we would find ourselves high up on the hill of Montmartre outside the beautiful church of the Sacré-Cœur. And there on Palm Sunday, the service would take place outside.

For me, I found the whole thing most moving because Palm Sunday out in public, inviting all who pass by to sing Hosanna.

[ 23 : 05 ] It was as if God was whispering, you're not excluded. Come walk alongside Jesus. The way will be painful and difficult.

But draw close and listen. This is the way of salvation. Robert Fulgham shares this story, Where Do the Mermaids Stand?

Giants, Wizards and Dwarfs was the game to play. Being left in charge of about 80 children, seven to ten years old, while their parents were off doing parent-y things, I mustered my troops in the church social hall and explained the game.

It's a large-scale version of rock, paper and scissors and involves some intellectual decision-making. But the real purpose of the game is to make a lot of noise and run around chasing people until nobody knows which side you're on or who won.

Organizing a room full of wound-up junior school children into two teams, explaining the rudiments of the game, achieving consensus on group identity, all this is no mean accomplishment.

[ 24 : 25 ] But we did it, he said, with good will and we're ready to go. And just as the excitement of the church had reached a critical mass, I yelled out, you have to decide now which you are, a giant, a wizard or a dwarf?

And while the groups huddled in frenzy and whispered consultation, he felt a tug on his trouser leg. A small child stands there looking up and asks in a small concerned voice, where did the mermaid stand?

Where did the mermaid stand? A long pause. A very long pause. Where did the mermaid stand?

Yes, you see, I am a mermaid, she said. There are no such things as mermaids. Oh yes, there are, because I'm one of them, she insisted.

She did not relate to being a giant, a wizard or a dwarf. She knew her category, mermaid. And she was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where a loser would stand.

[ 25 : 39 ] She intended to participate wherever mermaids fit into the scheme of things. Without giving up her dignity or identity, she took it for granted there was a place for mermaids and that I would know just where they fitted in.

Well, where do the mermaids stand? All the mermaids, all those who are different, who do not fit the norm and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes.

And so, he said, the mermaids stand right here by the king of the sea. So, we stood there hand in hand reviewing the troops of wizards, giants and dwarves as they passed in wild disarray.

It's not true, by the way, that mermaids do not exist. I know at least one personally. I've held a hand. And that's where we are.

Jesus stands with the mermaids. Jesus is the one who stands with those who don't fit in, who the powerful reject. The hosannas are not merely a cheerful noise, but a cry to our Messiah who is bringing us salvation.

[ 27 : 04 ] For many, Easter will never happen. It's about the Easter bunny and the chocolate. For others, this Holy Week is forgotten as they jump straight into the cheerfulness of Easter Sunday.

But without the hosannas of Palm Sunday, we lose our understanding of the resurrection. Without the overturning of the tables, we lose our understanding of the resurrection.

Without the Last Supper, we lose our understanding of the resurrection. Without all the events of Good Friday, we lose our understanding of the resurrection.

And without the empty tomb, we lose our understanding of the resurrection. There's a long time until it's Easter Sunday. The manner of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem expresses the character of his Messiahship.

This is no military conqueror on a war horse here. There's no political revolutionary here. His purpose is not to overthrow Rome or indeed the religious authorities.

[ 28 : 25 ] In the temple, we see him in his own true authority. As the hosannas ring out, save us.

This is what he is here to do, to break the power of sin. Not once, but forever. For everyone, from everywhere.

Where will your journey take you this Easter week? Will you journey with Jesus and see the power of sin broken forever?

Palm Sunday is the day we see the true identity of Jesus. If we let him, we can discover our own true identity. This is God's call of peace.

God's grace, which reaches out to you in love. I'm going to try an experiment now to finish. You can either hold your palm cross, or if you want to be modern, you can use your phone.

[ 29 : 33 ] And we're going to have a go at shouting. Are you good at that? And saying the words on the screen.

If you want to say them in Cantonese, that's fine, because it would be in different languages. And if you don't do well, because I've got the teacher in me, there'll be trouble. But we'll have two goes at it, okay? We'll have a practice, and then we'll do it for real. If you're able, of course, it would be good to stand. But wait, you don't have to. It's up to you. So it's Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna. Okay, ready? Here we go. Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna. Again. Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna. Hannah. Thank you.