



Call to Worship

We welcome the spirit of Christ into our midst.
We welcome and celebrate, lifting branches or laying cloaks
as a reminder that Christ is always welcome among and within us.
Hosanna, Immanuel! Welcome, Jesus of Nazareth!

Opening prayer

Ata marie, Brother Christ
walk with us through this time of worship
this day and this week.
Teach us to be brave and to love like you. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 27:45 – 54

On this Sunday there is the choice to recognise Palm Sunday by following the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem as Matthew tells it in the first eleven verses of chapter 21. Alternatively we can follow the passion trail where rather than taking their cloaks off in celebration the disciples clothe themselves in self-protection and denial. The passion story is contained in Matthew's gospel beginning at chapter 26:14 and goes all the way through to chapter 27:66. Ordinarily, we would celebrate Palm Sunday leaving the Passion recognition for later in the week. However, this morning I want to take part of the reading from Matthew 26. Many of us will be quite familiar with the story of Jesus betrayal, arrest, trials, conviction, execution, and death. It is a harrowing story. Our reading is subtitled "the death of Jesus" and I have included the passage below:

Matthew 27:45-54 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)

The Death of Jesus

⁴⁵ From noon on, darkness came over the whole land^[a] until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶ And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' ⁴⁷ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' ⁴⁸ At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.'^[b] ⁵⁰ Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.^[c] ⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ⁵³ After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'^[d]

Footnotes:

- a. [Matthew 27:45](#) Or *earth*
- b. [Matthew 27:49](#) Other ancient authorities add *And another took a spear and pierced his side, and out came water and blood*

- c. [Matthew 27:50](#) Or *gave up his spirit*
- d. [Matthew 27:54](#) Or *a son of God*

Message

I was drawn to this particular part of the overall passion narrative because of what Matthew tells us happens when Jesus dies. Reading from verse fifty-one; “at that moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.” The tearing of the curtain, the shaking of the earth, the splitting of rocks all contain metaphorical symbols. The curtain within the Temple was itself within the holiest of holies obscuring the presence of God from the people. Only the priests could enter into this area of the Temple behind the curtain. The tearing of the curtain from top to bottom reminds us that God is responsible. It is the first comment by God on the death of Jesus. The subsequent earthquake and splitting of the rocks are also indications of God’s active presence.

Jesus presence with the disciples has been destroyed for them by his death. Their reality has been disrupted. The three years that they have followed and been taught by Jesus have ended tragically. Their world has been taken from them through Jesus’ death.

It seems to me that we are in a very similar situation, today. The foundations of what we have taken for granted have shifted. Those foundations based in economics and social interactions have been shaken and some of those rocks have split. Our physical distancing, isolation and what seems to be the progressive unravelling of our financial world could be likened to the discombobulation, anxiety and even fear that the disciples felt during the passion experience. The disciples descend into sorrow and grief without any hope of a return to the life they had known with Jesus.

We are now nine or ten days into lockdown. However, unlike the disciples there is hope that at the end of four, or however many weeks lock down lasts, we will be able to resume life as we previously knew it, or at least very something similar. Unlike the disciples hopelessness and fear, despite what Jesus had told them we know that we are a week away for celebrating an new agreement or covenant from God for us.

We might well consider ourselves to be walking along a valley shadowed by the pandemic. We might have a feeling that the earth has changed around us as the disciples did following Jesus death. At Easter, God in Jesus is coming into the world to restore it. The world we are currently experiencing is not God’s intention because God has a better desire for us. At Easter we recall that God became vulnerable to make that good.

Our current physical distancing from those who are outside our bubble is somewhat like the disciples who looking out into the world did so with suspicion and not a little fear. “Love one another,” said Jesus, “as I have loved you and love your neighbour as yourself.” Given today’s world that is perhaps an even harder ask. But we need to remind ourselves that nothing is impossible for God. As you enter this week before Easter I encourage you to continue to trust in God who loves you. Amen.

Prayer for others

Loving God we pray for your world this morning. It is a world filled with sickness, sadness and sorrow because we have failed to care for things as you asked us. Forgive us.

Lord we pray for those who are sick and for those who are sorrowing. May your Spirit comfort them.

Lord we pray for those supporting, housing, feeding, caring for the homeless – those for whom self-isolating means something completely different to what we experience.

We pray for our GPs, nurses and medical staff; for those in hospital administration; for those procuring the necessary medical equipment, supplies and medications. May they know that we are thankful and that they are not alone.

We pray for those who drive the trucks that bring the goods to our hospitals, to the warehouses and to the supermarkets. May they travel safely.

We thank you Lord for those who work in the essential areas of our community are police officers, firefighters, supermarket staff. May they too know we appreciate what they do.

And in the quiet of this time we bring to you those that we have personal concerns for.

Hear these our prayers we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benediction

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the companionship of the holy Spirit be with each of you and those with you in your bubble this week and for ever. Amen.