



# **March Team Ministry**

**March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda**

*Welcome*

## **Sixth Sunday of Lent ~ Palm Sunday ~ 28th March 2021**

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at [andrew.marchurch@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.marchurch@gmail.com)

**We have Church services with social distancing, both our regular Sunday Services, and the special ones for this Holy Week. This week we offer two Meditations; one for Palm Sunday, and one on the Passion which may choose to save for later in the week.**

**St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am**

**St Mary's Sundays 9.15am**

**St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am**

**"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."**

### **Palm Sunday Prayers**

Hosanna to the Son of David,

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

God our hope of victory whom we constantly betray; grant us so to recognise your coming that in our clamour there may be commitment, and in our silence the very stones may cry aloud in your name. **Amen.**

Humble Lord, while people clamoured for a warrior-king, the colt revealed your servanthood: as you face the way of tears, the tearing of the temple veil, take us from the baying mob to place our faith in you, Jesus Christ, our victim and our saviour. **Amen.**

### **Gospel of St Mark 11 v1-11**

*When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." ' They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'*

*Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.*

## Meditation

A girl and a boy, scruffy dirty, from the poorer part of town, whose parents had little concern for their whereabouts, dodged and twisted through the throng on one side of the road. The boy shot through a gap in front of a man on a donkey and stopped so quickly the girl almost fell on top of him. She lifted her hand to cuff him in playful vexation, but the sight that has mesmerised him stayed her hand. She, too, stared upward in awe.

It was the man on the donkey, riding beneath palm branches held over him like a royal arch. His smile, which has first riveted the boy, was now cast upon the girl. He focussed his entire attention upon them both with a gaze of such a presence that a silent, instinctive, untroubled yearning covered them. So powerful was his smile that years later, in occasional quiet moments the memory of it would soothe their souls with a caress as certain as a physical touch.

Followers behind the colt surged forward, and the moment passed as the crowd swept in front of the boy and girl, blocking their view of the man on the colt. Without exchanging words or glances, each turned to follow, trying to squeeze around the legs of the chanting adults. They stayed with the crowd as the road turned slightly downward, dipping out of sight of the corner of Jerusalem. The road rose again shortly, bringing the Holy City into full view for the first time. What the children could not see, the man on the colt did. Here, from the east, it seemed that the city rose from a deep abyss, the valleys of Kedron and Himmon. The temple tower dominated the skyline, the vast temple courts spreading beneath. The massive temple walls on the eastern edge of the plateau seemed like cliffs, unassailable and as fixed as eternity. The upper palaces, brilliant white in the sunshine, now threw shadows across the garden terraces of the city below, giving an impression of unearthly splendour and an ache of beauty that could never be fully captured by memory or description.

What the children could not see, the man on the donkey did, as if in a single moment time's curtain rippled just enough to give him a ghastly vision; of earth heaped into ramps reaching the city walls; of legions of soldiers swarming triumphant; of a city outline marred by smoke of destruction; of proud temple walls shattered into piles of rubble; of hundreds of rebels dying on crosses too numerous to comprehend; of wailing mothers searching the ruins for bodies of mangled children... And then with another ripple of time, a new vision of dust swirling an eerie dance to a dirge sung by the moaning wind as it blew across the desolation of centuries – the rejection by God himself in horrible, cold punishment for a city about to butcher his son.

What the children could not see, the man on the donkey did, the beauty of the city and the inexorable tragedy that lay ahead. The force of the contrast tore loose from him a wrenching sob so loud it startled those beside him. His sorrow deepened into heaving lamentation, spreading a pall of uneasy silence over his followers. It was as if he spoke to the city when the agonised words left his mouth. "If only you had known, on this day, what would bring you peace – but it is now hidden from your eyes. The days will come when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side." He closed his eyes, but could not shut out the vision overwhelming him. "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 recognise the time of God's coming to you."

His weeping did not stop. The boy and girl crept forward. Unlike the adults, the terrible sorrow of the man on the donkey did not frighten them. It filled them with a longing to comfort him, as though he were a child in need of them. His sorrow drew them slowly to the colt where each shyly rested a hand on the hide of its flank. For as long as he wept they walked wordlessly and shared his grief.

*It was a march of revolution, it was a march of a stormy day,  
it was a cadence of cruel contemplation, it was a march, oh what a march.  
Oh it was a march for the sweet and gruesome  
to bring a light to their darkened place  
it was a march for the thirst of freedom,  
and it was beauty battered and bleeding; and it was a march.  
When it all comes down to me and you,  
will we walk away or march with the one who made the march, oh yeah?  
Do you know why you are lonely? Do you know why you are afraid?  
Do you know that Jesus loves you?  
Will you join the march? will you join the march, today?  
Oh it was march for the ones who judged him,  
dipping their crowns in a crimson flood.  
It was a march for the thief and harlot, humble and holy,  
oh, what a story, oh what a march.  
But when it all comes down to me and you,  
will we walk away or march on with the one who made the march?*

## **Good Friday Prayers**

Blessed are you Lord our God: through your Son Jesus Christ you have known our pain and show us your mercy.

**Surely he has borne our griefs; he has carried our sorrows.**

He was despised, he was rejected; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. **Surely he has borne our griefs; he has carried our sorrows.**

He was pierced for our sins, bruised for no fault but ours.

**Surely he has borne our griefs; he has carried our sorrows.**

His punishment has bought our peace, and by his wounds we are healed. **Surely he has borne our griefs; he has carried our sorrows.**

We had all strayed like sheep, but the Lord has laid on him the guilt of us all. **Surely he has borne our griefs; he has carried our sorrows.**

Behold the wood of the Cross, whereon was hung the Saviour of the world.

**O come let us worship.**

O God the source of our passion, who took upon us our unprotected flesh, open wide our arms to embrace our tortured world, that we may not turn away our eyes, but abandon ourselves to your mercy. Amen.

The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve:

to give up his life as a ransom for many.

When we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly.

The proof of God's amazing love is this:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Eternal God, look with mercy on this your family for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed and given up into the hands of sinners and to suffer death upon the cross. We see the depth of your love; in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Christ our victim, whose beauty was disfigured and whose body torn upon the cross; kindle in us your anger and desire; that in suffering we may not be consumed, but hold fast to you. Amen.**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

## **Gospel of St Mark 15 v33-34**

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

## **Meditation**

These words were found written on a wall of a cellar in which a Jewish victim of the Holocaust hid and died; "***I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love where feeling is not. I believe in God even if he is silent.***"

There seems to be no worse evil than to die rejected by men and apparently abandoned by God – a cursed blasphemer, tortured, spat upon and jeered at, and left to die on a rubbish heap outside the city wall. Jesus on the cross experiences the extreme limit of alienation and darkness. Like all of us, he was fearful of death and the process of dying. Now darkness deepens and his sense of God vanishes – has he been wrong all the time?

In his extremity of desolation, rage even, Jesus draws on a Psalm, 22. This psalm beginning with this cry of deepest distress, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?', moves through marked changes of mood all the way from blaming God to a reassertion of faith and certainty that deliverance will come: the conviction that the whole world will ultimately acknowledge God's goodness.

To work through a time of great suffering means resisting, in your deepest being, the contracting of your whole world into a single blinding point of pain. It means a great act of will so that you may recover your sense of the reality of God and your belief in the end that "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." (*Dame Julian of Norwich*)

Yet I want to stay for a moment with the anguish and the desolation as yet unresolved, because it seems that this is the point that the nature of God incarnate, in this man Jesus, is most sharply seen. Here is mystery indeed. Here in this dark hour is the divine pity revealed; God at one with all who, for whatever reason, feel they are forsaken.

I find this anguished cry of Jesus of such great comfort because in it I hear the cry of all in our time who experience total darkness and alienation. Here the passion of Jesus links with the passion of all people. We hear of many things that end in violent death – many hopes turned to dust and ashes. The most potent is the Jewish people whose journey ended, not in the Promised Land, but in gas chambers along with 8 million fellow humans. There are places the world knows; Golgotha, Belsen, Auschwitz, Siberia, Ruanda, Balkans, Yemen, Burma and far too many other places where men and women, made like us in God's image and each of infinite and unique worth, are abused, tortured so that they may betray their friends, imprisoned for conscience sake and killed.

Yes the Passion goes on. And here is the strangest paradox and to our minds the deepest mystery: that the crucified Jesus, who at this point knew to the full the ultimate isolation of the human spirit apparently cut off from God, is at the same time the 'only accurate picture of God that the world has ever seen'. If we believe that God is reconciling the world to himself by revealing his 'human face' in Jesus, then we must be willing to have our understanding of God profoundly changed, here is a God who shares the dirt and the pain, the weakness and the loneliness, the very death that we experience ourselves.

Every year, on Good Friday, people die, and at least some will, in their time of suffering, feel forsaken by God, afraid of the dark and cheated by God. Dame Cicely Saunders said out of the depth of her long experience with the suffering and the dying: ***"Surely all the hard things that have happened to anyone in his creation have happened to God himself. As any mother seeing her child suffer is suffering herself, so the Father of everyone has received all the sorrow and pain himself....and the presence of Jesus in history was the presence of God as he has always been and always will be."***

Like most people, as a priest, and as a family member, I have celebrated both the joys and sorrows of human life. I have sat with the dying, tried to console the bereaved, spent time encouraging the unloved and listening to the wounded and lonely. I know of times when it is almost impossible to pray at all. I feel that, for me, the only words that have helped in these depths have to do with Christ crucified; or rather, the Easter Christ who still bears in his hands the marks of the nails and the wound in his side. The only words that I sense have helped others have had to do with the concept of a suffering God, whose love for each of us cannot be altered or diminished and of whom I can say (with the psalmist, 139), 'If I reach up to heaven, thou art there; if I go down to hell, thou art there also.'

We began with the words scratched on a wall of a concentration camp prison; ***"I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love where feeling is not. I believe in God even if he is silent."*** What the cry of desolation of Jesus the crucified; ***'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*** reveals is the God who is with us at the most desperate point of human need.

Father, we rejoice in our fellowship with the shepherds, the angels, the magi, Mary and Joseph: in your unfailing love for us and for all people hear our prayers through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**O God, the source of all insight, whose coming was revealed to the nations, not among men of power, but on a woman's lap: give us grace to seek you where you may be found, that the world may be humbled and discover your unexpected joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**