



March Team Ministry

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

Welcome

1st Sunday in Lent - 26th February 2023

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 572117 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

We are still asking people to be sensible and sensitive . Mask wearing is optional. Respect people's space. Washing hands is a good idea. Wine offered (for those wishing it). Dipping is not recommended.

Regular Church Services

St Peter's ~ Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am
St Mary's ~ Sundays 9.15am; St Wendreda's ~ Sundays 11am
St John's ~ Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

Prayer, Collect for this week

Humble Lord, while people clamoured for a warrior-king, the colt revealed your servanthood. Your love is broken open among cheering crowds, the mockery of power turning to baying mob: as we follow your way of passion, give us faith to bring our weak and divided hearts to the foot of the cross and the door of the unguarded tomb that they may be astonished and healed, through Jesus Christ, who carries the weight of the world. Amen.

Lord of the swaying palms, the stones of the earth and the beasts of burden bear witness to your coming: lead us from the violence of empire and the collusion of crowds to a heart of flesh, a world re-made and a new song for all creation; through Jesus Christ, the crucified God. Amen.

Old Testament: Zechariah 9 v8-12

Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that no one shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again overrun them, for now I have seen with my own eyes. Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem; and the battle-bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

Gospel of St Matthew 21 v1-7

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead 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, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt,

The foal of a donkey. The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven! 'When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers. 'The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became angry and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself"? 'He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Meditation

Two men approach Bethphage on foot. Peter, the red-headed one on the right with a sword strapped to his side, wears the rough clothing of a fisherman; and a perpetual scowl of suspicion common to labourers who understand no way to make money except with their own hands. The other, John, is taller with thinning brown hair. He walks with a staff. As they near Bethphage, unlike the pilgrims, they peer ahead not for their first view of Jerusalem, but for a donkey colt. As they enter the hamlet, John points ahead of him. A colt is tethered to a post outside the doorway of an inn. "Remarkable, is it not?" John asks, shaking his head in admiration. "It is right where he said it would be." "Hardly worth talking about," Peter snorts. "Remember Lazarus?"

They approach the colt. A group of men are gathered nearby, older men in chairs in front and younger men standing behind, amusing themselves with comments about passers-by. "I don't like this," Peter says, "It would have been better if he had sent Judas with some money. Why should they let us just take the colt?" "Walk proud," John answers, "Keep your faith. You know who sends us." At the inn Peter and John smile and nod with the awkwardness of latecomers to a party. Peter, remembering his faith, bends his head and begins to untie the colt.

"You!" a man nearby challenges, stepping towards them, "What are you doing?" Peter says nothing, knowing Jesus is a man of peace. "You!" the man repeats, "Are you deaf? Touched in the head?" Peter straightens, his hands still on the halter rope. He can stay patient only so long. "I hear you with no difficulty. As for my head, it is perfectly..." "Ho, ho," the man laughs with the assurance of one accustomed to brawls, "But a few words and I can tell you are from the north. All they grow up there are simpletons." He pauses, looking to his companions for support; their grins more than enough encouragement for him. "So tell me, country boy, what are you doing?"

The tendons on the side of Peter's neck strain as he tried to control his temper. "This is a rope," Peter explains, "The rope is attached to the colt. My fingers are upon the rope. As my fingers pull apart the knot, the rope becomes untied. Once I untie the rope, the colt will be free. It is the simplest concept. Surely even the dimmest minds can..." "Peace, Peter," John interrupts. "Think peace. And remember our instructions." "Bad enough they cut me short," hisses Peter, "But you! If I don't get a chance to speak a full sen..." John speaks directly to the men, remembering the Master's instructions. "Our Lord needs this colt. He will send it back shortly."

The men nearby protest. Why should two complete strangers take a colt that doesn't belong to them? An older man in the front, his beard totally grey calls for silence. "Tell me," the older man says, speaking to John, "This Lord of yours. Would he happen to be the Prophet from Nazareth?" "None other," John replies. "We have heard rumours of his arrival," the old man says, "Will he pass by here?" John nods. The old man thinks for several seconds. "The story about a dead man. Lazarus of Bethany. Were you there? Is it true?"

"Words cannot do justice," Peter claims stoutly, "I smelled the stench of death myself. And out of the darkness Lazarus came forth, called by our Lord." The others begin to whisper among themselves. The old man makes his decision. There can be no harm and possibly great gain in extending a favour to a famous worker of miracles. "Take the colt then." As Peter unties the halter, John smiles at the old man. "Tell me," John asks the man, "has this colt been ridden before?" "It is unused," the man replies, "Why?" "No reason," John says, "idle curiosity."

Peter glances over the colt's head at John. They smile at each other. The Master was wise enough to foresee why they would be allowed to take the colt, divine enough to know it had never been ridden. Their private moment passes, and they lead the colt back towards Bethany where Jesus has already begun to lead a procession on foot.

As soon as Peter and John turn a corner in the road, the young men in front of the inn scatter to spread the news in all directions, taking ownership in the arrival of the miracle man of Nazareth by proudly being the first to spread the word. As for the older men, they merely wait by the side of the road. They have long since learned that most of life's important events seem to arrive with or without their efforts. Nor do they intend to lose their vantage point. The arrival of the man of Galilee promises to be an event worth remembering, one never again to be repeated in history; divinity passing by on a colt.

God bless, Andrew

Stations of the Cross

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We sign ourselves with the cross of Christ.

Father, in Baptism we were signed with the Cross of Christ.

There is an urgency in our Christian lives that allows no pause for we are indeed a pilgrim people

We cannot stand still, we cannot remain the same.

As now we meditate again on the Way of the Cross we continue on our journey seeking yourself.

Be with us Lord, as we accept the Cross that each of us must carry.

Humanity is clay moulded through suffering. Suffering runs deep in us, from the first cry which ushers us into life, to the last laboured breath that hands us over to eternity. Suffering is a mystery to us. It is the mystery of Christ's cross. And that cross offers us two alternatives: either we can fall crushed beneath the cross or, suffering, be lifted up, triumphant through crucified, hanging in the immensity of God's love.

'Behold the man', says Pilate as Jesus stands before the crowd. This indeed is the Man, man fully human, man as he ought to be. With Christ, the real man, we can dare to move to our own Calvary.

Heavenly Father, your Son has trodden the path before us. May we draw strength to go forward, knowing that today we will have to face nothing that will be like His suffering. Whatever we may have to face, his love and compassion will keep us firmly on the path you walk with us. For this we thank you through that same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I: Jesus is condemned to death

The Prisoner, looking beyond his captors, said little in his own defence, responding only in honesty and truth. Because of this, they had already agreed his guilt.

Like a guilty criminal before the court Jesus is condemned to die. He is accused of having spoken improperly about God. He who is the Word of God, He who is not guilty of anything; but is accused of inventing new ways of loving God and his fellow men and women. What exactly has he done? You already know! He has said that he came to save people on earth from evil and despair. What exactly has he done? You already know! To all people, without exception, he has shown the immense love of God!

It is you, O Lord who always stand by the side of the innocent!

How many raised hands have threatened people everywhere! Violent hands have splattered the pages of history with blood. Blood has been shed by Christians, even in the name of Christ himself.

So many accusing fingers... denouncing, destroying brothers and sisters, our fellow humans. How ready we are to blame others for our own calamities, our failures, our sin... How easily we point the finger at colleagues, parents, children, partners those who cannot defend themselves! Like the crowd I am always ready to release Barabbas... The Barabbas hidden in me, my secret violent man. And yet, as we make others suffer, we diminish ourselves. Our threatening hands bind us with new chains.

Father, send your Just One to forgive the Barabbas that is in me. Grant me mercy, so that I may stop pointing my accusing finger. Let me learn to love as you are loving me. Teach me how to free others so that I too may be free.

Lord, we hear your voice declaring (for all who will listen) the mystery of Incarnation. We seek your silent face and acknowledge our need for forgiveness.

II: Jesus is given his cross to carry

Condemned, he was taken by force of arms at dawn. Having beaten him they led him away for execution to a place beyond the city limits.

The cross is heavy; there is nothing heavier than a cross: it is nothing but sorrow, it is nothing but tears, it is nothing but suffering.

Jesus stumbles. The cross crushes him.

It is heavy on his shoulders, but even heavier in his heart. It keeps him bowed, bent, weighed down. It is a burden.

It is you, O Lord, who share the weight of our sorrows.

Man humiliates man. What is that heap of bones, that pathetic pile of rags at the side of our roads? It is a man, as I am a man. Hungry belly, face stained with mud. Many like him cry out....

But every humiliation inflicted on any person disfigures us all, because it disfigures the humanity we share. The individual is increasingly lonely, more and more a mystery to himself, to herself; because 'anyone who does wrong will be repaid in turn.' Our wrongs mount up the burden becomes unsupportable. To take up the cross, day by day, man needs God's hand, Christ's own strong hand to help him. *It is difficult, Lord, to look outside myself, difficult to look within and face the wounds of this man suffering. Teach me then, Good Lord, to carry the cross of my being human, so that I may truly know that with you the burden is light. And only with you is the burden light.*

Lord, you accepted your cross and began your final journey; - it had to be done. May I accept my Cross, understanding that my journey cannot be made without you.