

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

***Palm Sunday***

## **Gospel Reading**

**Matthew 21:1-11**

### **Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem**

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.'

### **Other Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-end or Psalm 118:19-24**

#### **Homily**

What a wonderful thing it is to be popular! To be famous!! To be a celebrity!!!

If there is a moment in the life of Our Lord when Jesus really was a Superstar, an A-list celebrity, it's surely the moment we read about today. Sometimes called the 'Triumphal Entry', Jesus arrives in Jerusalem with a substantial fan base and a great chance to build up his follower numbers. 'Hosanna' the crowd shouts. 'Praise!'

Celebrity is big business. That much is obvious. But it goes deeper than that. Popularity and fame are tightly woven into the fabric of our society. They are part of how we measure people, how we assess their importance. Sometimes this is very literal and numerical, as in the number of subscribers that someone is able to get for their YouTube channel. Sometimes it's vaguer than that, as in the complex range of factors that influence how 'newsworthy' someone is. Either way we are locked into a cultural framework in which being popular,

being famous, being liked, being praised, are deeply connected to how people are valued, how they are positioned in the semi-formal hierarchy of importance that also dictates our own self-worth.

In some ways, the Church has swallowed this preoccupation with popularity. We worry about declining numbers attending public worship, about the loss of status and authority in the nation and in the world. It can often seem as though success in Christian mission is all about how many people we can draw into our fan base. The dark side is that we may easily feel ourselves to be failures when fewer people than we'd hoped show up at church. So today provides a good opportunity for us to reflect on what a truly Christian attitude to popularity, fame, and celebrity might be.

Palm Sunday sees Jesus at the peak of his fame. On the surface this is a straightforward episode in a story that ought to lead on to whatever the first century equivalent of Oscar-winning glory was. If he hasn't already, Jesus is about to 'make it big'.

We know, of course, that Jesus is in fact on a very different journey from that. In just a few days he will experience the same crowds shouting not 'Hosanna' but 'Crucify him!'. Even his closest friends will desert, deny and betray him. Only a few faithful followers will dare to stay close to him all the way through his arrest, torture and crucifixion.

We know that, but the crowd on that first Palm Sunday didn't know it. The gospel writers make clear that only Jesus himself really understood what was about to happen to him. And the interesting thing, the really important thing, is that Jesus didn't turn aside from the path. His loss of popularity, the startling reversal of public opinion and the fickleness of fame were not, for him, evidence of failure. The measure that Jesus applied was different – it was the will of God the Father. That will was and is the divine love that reaches out to us, offering us forgiveness and healing of all that is amiss and a share in God's own eternal life.

What would our world look like if people were valued not according to their celebrity but in proportion to their love? What would the Church look like if the measure of mission was not popularity but love? What would our lives look like if we valued ourselves and others not in a hierarchy of fame but in a community of love?

It can feel wonderful to be popular, to be loved, to be praised, to be important. But all of these things, Jesus knew, are distractions from something that matters much, much more. God's love for us, and God's command that we love in our own turn are the true measure of a Christian life.

So as we set out on this Holy Week, following Christ in the way of the cross, witnessing again how his popularity evaporated, his friends deserted and his work seemed to all the world to end in disaster, let's remember that these apparent failures were actually triumphs. They were triumphs of love. And may our own love for God and for one another be strengthened and deepened as we share in Christ's journey, and lead us on to the glorious joy of Easter.

## Conversation Questions

1. Think about Jesus' journey from the celebrity of Palm Sunday to the infamy of Good Friday. What challenges for us as followers of Jesus are present here?
2. How do you measure the 'success' of what you do as a church?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

## Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

## Collect of the day

*Almighty and everlasting God,  
who in your tender love towards the human race  
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
to take upon him our flesh  
and to suffer death upon the cross:  
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,  
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.*

*(or)*

*True and humble king,  
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:  
grant us the faith to know you and love you,  
that we may be found beside you  
on the way of the cross,  
which is the path of glory.*

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is incorporated in this service paper, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council, 2000. Scripture passage from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised) copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.