

Palm Sunday

My dear Friends,

This Sunday, the fifth in Lent is Palm Sunday, the day that begins the most important week of the Church year, Holy Week. In Welsh we call it Yr Wythnos Fawr, the great or large week. At this time we recall in our Scripture readings and in the Liturgy of the services in our churches the events of the Passion, the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. For those who are at home perhaps you will read in your Bibles the Gospel accounts of these days and imagine them as we do in Church in our mind's eye what our Lord went through on the first Holy Week.

Normally in our parish on Palm Sunday in both our churches we recall the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem with processions. In St Margaret's we gather in Roath Church House, have our palm crosses blessed and walk along Waterloo Rd singing 'All glory laud and honour' to church to continue the Eucharist. In St Edward's we begin in Church and after the palms are blessed we process through Roath Mill Gardens again singing the same hymn. In both cases it is a wonderful act of witness and a public reminder to the community of the importance of this time for Christians in all parts of the world.

Last year the law prevented us from having live church services. This year although public worship is permitted, outdoor gatherings are still forbidden so no processions. We shall still however mark Palm Sunday in a less demonstrative fashion in our services. Perhaps it will help us remember many of our brothers and sisters in the Christian family who live in places where they are persecuted for their faith and are as rule prevented from practicing their beliefs.

When the disciples heard from Jesus that they were to go to Jerusalem they were full of anticipation and hope of what would come. The city of Jerusalem was and still is the most important place for Jewish people. They would go to the city for two reasons, to enthrone or pay homage to the King and secondly to offer sacrifice to God, to celebrate his love, his offer of salvation, his covenant or agreement with the people. The followers of Jesus hoped that now was the time that he would reveal himself to everyone as the Messiah they had awaited so long. They believed he would confront the corrupt elite in the religious leadership and oppose the Roman secular authorities that occupied and cruelly ruled their land. Jesus had warned them of the sufferings that would come to him and those who would follow him. However denying yourself and taking up your cross had been interpreted as a preacher's rhetoric of hard times but ones that were worth going through for the prize of freedom from oppression.

It all started so well with Jesus riding on a colt the foal of an ass, just as the prophet Zechariah had foretold. The excited crowds greeted him with jubilant cries of hosanna and paid respect to him, paving his path with their garments and palm branches. The prophet's words 'Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass!' were ringing in their ears. It was in direct contrast at that moment in history when a Roman general had also arrived in the city with military and civic ceremony proclaiming a very different rule and power.

This is just the beginning of our Holy Week and as the days unfold we shall learn again of the events that transpired and formed the faith that we hold and share. In whatever way and place we pray let us concentrate our reflections on those days and recall what it means for us as we seek to follow in the way of Christ in our time with all that we and our loved ones face.

Best wishes and prayers

Stewart

The Reverend Canon Stewart Lisk,
Vicar of Roath.