



Today we come into the presence of God with so much pressing in on us. We come, unsettled at having to worship in a different way. But we can still come. So draw near to us dear Lord, come close to us now as we meet in our homes, perhaps on our own at most with just our closest family members. Come open us to your loving Spirit. **Amen**

Hymn Ride on Ride on in Majesty

1 Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry;
Your humble beast pursues its road
with palms and scattered garments strowed.

2 Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die:
O Christ, your triumphs now begin
o'er captive death and conquered sin.

3 Ride on, ride on in majesty!
The winged squadrons of the sky
look down with sad and wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.

4 Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Your last and fiercest strife is nigh;
the Father on his sapphire throne
expects his own anointed Son.

5 Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
bow your meek head to mortal pain,
then take, O God, your power and reign.

Prayer

God of the gateway, we worship you today, recognising that you are worthy of all we can offer. Open something in us, free us to worship you in spirit and truth.

Jesus Christ who, by your death and resurrection, opened the gates to salvation for all, we worship you today, recognising that we need you. We can't make it on our own after all.

Holy Spirit, mediator and energiser, come amongst us, come amongst our friends and family, those that we cannot be with at this time, that gates may be opened and lives transformed by your power. Amen

Let us say the Lord's Prayer



Reading Matthew 21:1-11

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately. ⁴ This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵ “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.”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ 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!”

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” ¹¹ The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Reflection on the reading

You might also care to read today Psalm 118. It has much to say to us in these times. In verse 19 however we read this:

‘Open to me the gates of righteousness’, cries the psalmist. As I hear those words, especially on Palm Sunday, certain images come to my mind... We have gates to keep things in and we have gates to keep things out and the opening and closing of gates plays a part in our lives in all sorts of ways. At the moment so many gates seem to be closed to us.

The old city of Jerusalem is today surrounded by a wall which contains 8 gates... Gates in walls are always important because they are places of entry and exit and places of encounter... With only a few days of his life on earth remaining, Jesus rides into the city of Jerusalem... On that occasion, as Matthew tells us, Jesus approached the city gates on a humble donkey and as he did so the resounding cries of Psalm 118 ringing loud in our ears...

- ‘Open to me the gates of righteousness’,
- ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord’,
- ‘Hosanna’!

That word Hosanna probably meant ‘Save us’ initially, but it becomes mixed up with a shout of praise as well – it is a cry which recognises two things; a need for help and that Jesus is the one who can meet that need. Matthew tells us it is a very large crowd and again images come to my mind... a picture of the whole world crowded around a gate crying out for help, for life, for goodness, for salvation, for healing.



Looking at the story as Matthew tells it to us; we see that the crowds did three things: Firstly, they cut branches from trees and used them to welcome Jesus. The waving of branches was an integral part of the ancient Jewish Festival of Tabernacles, referred to as the psalm declares, 'Bind up the festal procession with branches...' Matthew's original readers will have made the connection between branches and worship and recognise that this man riding humbly on a donkey is one to be worshipped.

Worship can be a gate-opening experience! When we offer ourselves to God in worship something happens which speaks of the presence and the glory of God and can open the gates of people's hearts.

Secondly the crowd shouted 'Hosanna, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'. They recognised that Jesus was the one they needed. Sometimes the gates which have to be opened are the gates with which we fence ourselves off from any sort of need. The culture of today can lead us to think we must be strong, we must be perfect, we must be self-sufficient and able to cope with anything. But the truth is that we are not supposed to live like that – we are supposed to live in relationship with a God who will supply all our needs – if we recognise that we have them. Shouting 'Hosanna' today is one way to open those gates and let God into our lives.

Thirdly, the crowd answered questions and pointed others to Jesus too. When the whole city, in turmoil, asks 'Who is this?' the crowds replied 'This is Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee'.

Put like that it sounds easy, but we're not always very good at doing it... at answering questions openly, being willing to say 'It's Jesus who makes the difference in my life. Come and meet him.' That too can open gates for our friends and neighbours. On this Palm Sunday, let's open the gates we find in ourselves and open gates for others too so that the King of glory can enter in!

Intercessions

Loving Lord we pray for those who share our lives and those who cannot share with us in the usual way at this time.

We pray for those who are struggling with all that is going on around them, the isolation, the uncertainty and the fears

We hold before you those who we rely upon, our NHS staff, our shop workers, our delivery drivers, our postman and all those volunteering in our community

We pray for those who are putting themselves in harms way for the sake of others, especially those working in our hospitals.

Through your Holy Spirit open within us the gates that hold us back from fully serving you, may we be released, and empowered, and guided in the way of Jesus.



Dear Lord, as we enter this Holy Week, our normal routine cast aside, may we seek to journey with you. Thursday we will grapple to understand. Friday we will mourn what we have lost. Saturday will come and go, but on Sunday may your purpose become clear. Amen

Hymn: From Heaven you came

From heaven you came helpless babe, entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve, and give Your life that we might live.

*This is our God, The Servant King, he calls us now to follow Him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to The Servant King*

There in the garden of tears my heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn, 'Yet not My will but Yours, ' He said.

Come see His hands and His feet, the scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered.

So let us learn how to serve and in our lives enthrone Him,
Each other's needs to prefer for it is Christ we're serving.

Blessing

Go into Holy Week, clinging to hope amongst the darkness.
Go with joy, knowing that resurrection is around the corner.
Go with peace, and seek a better world. Amen.

