



Palm Sunday 2021

Dear friends

You may have seen Mel Gibson's film *'The Passion of the Christ.'* For some, it's a moving portrayal of our Lord's suffering and death. For others, a too violent depiction of His journey to the cross. When I first saw it, it moved me to tears, partly because the contrasts are so great: between the love of the Lord Jesus, not least for His mother, and the punishment He received; between His faithfulness to His Father's will and the violence towards Him; between His compassionate gaze, through blood-stained eyes, and the cruelty of His torture and crucifixion.

Holy Week announces God's remedy in Christ for the damage of sin and the destruction of death. Because we have free will, the tensions are still alive within and around us. But sin and death no longer have the last laugh. These tensions and contrasts fill the *'Hosanna'* of the Gospel and the *'Crucify'* of the Passion. They're there in the question *'The Passion of the Christ'* places on the lips of Pontius Pilate: *'Is this not the prophet who, only five days ago, you welcomed into Jerusalem?'* How often we say one thing and do another.

Palm Sunday opens a week of tension and contrast, of paradoxes and contradictions. For so many people this past year has done the same. But the events that unfold in Holy Week are not some casual string of haphazard inevitabilities. The Lord Jesus enters Jerusalem a king. *'Hosanna,'* shouts the crowd, *'Blessings on him who comes in the Lord's name.'* He sets His face like flint, not by clinging to equality with God, but by emptying Himself, becoming a servant who humbly accepts death on a cross. The Scriptures foretold it was necessary that the Son of Man should suffer, and die, and rise again. But the steps are His own. He makes no resistance. He doesn't turn away. The Lord riding in majesty becomes, almost overnight, a *'dead man walking.'*

Years ago I visited a small Greek Island. A commotion began and the tourists became excited as a distant procession made its way down the Island's main road. Two priests were at the front, led by somebody swinging incense. Cameras came out and someone speculated it was a ceremony to bless the fishing boats. But it wasn't. As the people came closer, many were crying. Further back was a weeping woman with her children. Behind her was carried the coffin of her dead husband. With my friends, we felt utterly stupid not to have realised what was going on. We'd simply joined the crowd, misunderstanding and misinterpreting.

Today we are close to the Mount of Olives. In a few days we will stand on Mount Calvary. Today the Lord Jesus is carried by a beast of burden. In a few days He will carry the burden of the cross. Today people spread their cloaks before Him. In a few days every garment will be stripped from His body. Today there are cries of blessing, soon it will be curses. Today His disciples can't keep quiet. In a few days there will be no words to express how they feel. Some many emotions will be in each of our hearts.

We all misunderstand and misinterpret. We struggle to accept the Lord's love and forgiveness. We forget the promise that He is always with us. We're caught up in the tensions and contrasts of life, of doubt, of sin. The pandemic has brought burdens for everyone, some more visible, others hidden. Everything we are, all our experiences of success and failure, of love and hurt, find a place in the heart of the Lord Jesus this week.

And so, follow Him. We open our own hearts, and all that's within us, to what He says and does. We watch. We listen. We follow. We fall silent. We rise and rejoice.

'Is this not the prophet who, only five days ago, you welcomed into Jerusalem?' We Today we welcome the Lord Jesus as king. This week, we accompany Him, our suffering and crucified Saviour. Next Saturday evening and Sunday we greet Him as our Risen Lord. All our misunderstandings and misinterpretations, our weeping and rejoicing, our wounds and our dreams, are caught up into the power forever released by His resurrection. If we remember nothing else, let us carry forward these words into Holy Week: in Jesus Christ there is hope and healing for today, for tomorrow, and for eternity.

[The Hope Within You](#)

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