

THE WAY TO THE CROSS
25th MARCH 2018

Mark 11:1-11 The Palm Cross

Does everybody have a palm cross? Will you wave them? Will you wave them and shout Hosanna?

Let me tell you the story of the Palm Crosses: they come from Africa, from Tanzania, from 8 villages in the Masai part of Tanzania; they are made of leaves from a palm tree which grows wild around these villages and the people cut down the leaves, dry them and cut them into strips. They are taken back to the villages either on foot or by bike and the strips are then woven into the crosses that we have today; they are transported from Tanzania to the UK and we have them to wave, take home and remember Palm Sunday.

The people who make these are poor and so making these Palm crosses is a way of earning some extra money to buy clothes, soap, salt, or medical supplies when people are sick. This little business gives them extra money to add to the selling of cashew nuts!

Can you think of a time when you were praised for something you did? When you were given a round of applause? Or when you were sent a letter or an e-mail from someone saying that what you did was really good? Or you have a report card at school that says you are a star pupil? How did it feel to be praised like that? How did it feel when someone said you were good? It makes us feel good and makes us happy!

The Palm Crosses bring two stories together: The first is Palm Sunday, when Jesus is praised for being a great king, for being the Saviour, the One who comes in the name of the Lord. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and people celebrated. I think He did it deliberately because there was an old prophecy that God's King would come riding on donkey and so here is Jesus, the King and people celebrate and sing and wave palm branches and put their coats on the road to say "here is our King; rejoice!" The palm branches were part of that.

The second story is Friday, Good Friday we call it, though doesn't seem that way to start with! It is the story of Jesus being crucified, dying on a cross and everything seemed bleak; all His friends were sad; the sky turned black in the middle of the day. But Easter tells us that when Jesus died He did what He had to do to save us; our salvation depends on His cross and so because of the cross we are saved, and we are brought to God to be blessed by God in so many ways. All of this happened because of the cross.

The Palm Cross brings these two stories together; they help us remember Jesus, the King who is celebrated on Palm Sunday; and they help us remember the King who is crucified and who dies to be our Saviour.

Mark 14:1-11

Mark 14:27-31

"Stay with me" – based on Jesus and His disciples in Gethsemane; He wants them to pray but they fall asleep: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zktivORaeJA>

Prayers for Others

Martin Niemoller: "First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no-one left to speak for me." Are we asleep? What changes, issues are we sleeping through? What is happening in our world on our watch and we are asleep?

Mark 15:33-39

The Way to the Cross

Do you keep a diary? I don't have the stamina; I would keep it for a little while, but then I'd forget or I couldn't be bothered and it would come to a quick and sticky end! Some people do keep a diary and are very good at it and later you find year after year of diaries in a box or a cupboard; the diary is a record of events, of things that happened in the world, in the street, in the family – "I went to church this morning and the preacher was a bit iffy!" - and is also a record of how you felt about what happened, recording your reaction to these events and the impact they made on you – "the preacher was iffy, but I enjoyed church anyway!". The diary becomes a place to confide their deepest emotions for some people, in way that they couldn't tell a person; "Dear diary..."

Let's imagine that Peter keeps a diary. We come to events of this week and Peter has recorded these events because that's what we have in Mark's gospel, Peter's record as told to his young friend. Let's also imagine how Peter reacts to these events; and this is a work of imagination; the week begins as the best week in his life, but then becomes worst week.

Chapter 11: Palm Sunday: it was great! What a crowd, singing and dancing and waving palm branches as Jesus rode into town. We'd been sent to find a donkey; we couldn't work out why at first, but then we knew; the people were shouting "Hosanna!" Fantastic!

Chapter 14: a strange dinner tonight: we visited Simon's house and a woman came in with her jar of perfume; some of us wanted to stop her, but Jesus was quite content to let her pour this perfume all over His head; she was preparing Him for His burial, He said; I don't understand Him sometimes.

Chapter 14: (later) This was not a good night; Jesus is arrested! To make matters worse we have let Him down badly: I promised to go with Him whatever it took and that I would die with Him, but I've denied even knowing Him; how low can I get? Then he wanted us to pray for Him, but we all fell asleep! Not so much of His friends now, are we! It can't get much worse than this; despair is sitting in my soul.

Chapter 15: It is Friday and Jesus is dead. The events went by in such a rush today: He was arrested, accused, tried by Pilate, taken away by the soldiers, and crucified; He has died. All we could do was stand and watch; all that we had hoped of Him is gone; our hopes are dashed; deep despair has settled in all of us. It can't get any worse than this, can it?

The best week, then the worst week in Peter's life! We read the stories of Holy Week and we can understand that. We've read a selection this morning to try to catch a flavour of what this week looks like and feels like. From Palm Sunday in all its excitement and exuberance; to the woman who pours out her best perfume on Jesus in an act of great devotion; to Gethsemane and Jesus wrestling with His destiny and wanting His friends to stay with Him, but they fall asleep; to the events of Good Friday and Jesus ending His day on the cross with His friends watching from a distance, grieving, frightened lest it should be them next! This is the Easter story, except Easter is still to come and its joy is for next week; today we stay with Good Friday, with the crown of thorns; with the suffering, dying Jesus. How do we react? With the

deep despair we imagine in Peter? Or are we blasé because we know how the story ends? Let's walk with Jesus the way to the cross!

Paul's last words in his letter to the Ephesians are these: "*Grace to...*" (*Ephesians 6:24*) We don't always know what to make of all of this; we don't always understand everything about these events; some of them leave us with more questions and answers and that is completely understandable. The emotions that these events draw from us are also complex: sometimes there is celebration, sometimes there is fear, sometimes we have sadness, sometimes confusion, sometimes even anger that a good man should be made to face up to all of this. But over it all, here is one response that is good for us to make, "*to love the Lord Jesus with an undying love*". To love Jesus means to hold Him dear, to esteem Him deeply, to have Him in our hearts as someone to love; this is more than 'admire', more than 'respect', but a deep, lasting unbreakable love in our hearts for One who has done all of this for us. This is what it means to delight in Him!

"If I were sitting on the end of the pier, on a summer day, enjoying the sunshine and the air, and someone came along and jumped into the water and got drowned 'to prove his love for me' I should find it quite unintelligible. I might be in much need of love, but an act in no rational relation to any of my necessities could not prove it. But if I had fallen over the pier and were drowning, and someone sprang into the water, and at the cost of making my peril, or what but for him would be my fate, his own, saved me from death, then I should say 'Greater love hath no man that this'....as we look at the Cross, He bore our sins, He died our death. It is so His love constrains us." (Jas Denney; *Death of Christ*; p.177,8) Or in France on Friday, we saw Lt-Col Beltrame do exactly this and take the place of some who were hostages; today he is a hero to France, honoured because he gave his life for others; but to some he is much, much more than that because these are the people whose place he took, and to them he will be loved, and they will delight in him because of what he did for them, personally.

We are loved by Jesus like this; let us love Him back with a love in our hearts that never dies. Delight in Him, walk with Him, love Him with all our hearts, with a love that never dies!