

Palm Sunday

5 April 2020, 11am

Christ Church New Southgate & Friern Barnet

Sermon: Here comes your King

NB. This sermon uses making a paper cross by folding and tearing. See video for guide.

Step 1: Fold paper a 1/3 down

Did you know that you can buy coronavirus earrings? They are mini toilet rolls – made out of tiny white beads, that dangle from hoops. What do you think will become a symbol of the time of coronavirus for us? Maybe it will be mini toilet roll earrings. Maybe it will be new mega hospitals at conference centres. Maybe it will be clapping keyworkers in the streets. In John's gospel we find lots of important symbols. Here in chapter 12 we're going to look briefly at palm branches and the donkey. In the time of Jesus the palm branch was a symbol of liberation and freedom. As Psalm 118 says – the people of God celebrated by waving palm branches and dancing round the altar. In the time of the Maccabees, when the temple was restored to the people of God, palm branches had been waved and so it stuck. Whenever there was a big event – palm leaves were waved, whenever people wanted to share pride in their heritage – palm leaves were waved. Palm branches were the symbol of Israel, of freedom and of hope.

Step 2: Fold paper in half longways

When the crowd realised Jesus was in town – they knew what they needed. Palm branches, to wave, to celebrate and to underline the words they said: Here comes your King. For the crowd wanted Jesus to be their King, they said he was the King of Israel. Just like we might wave flags for the Queen in the UK, the crowd greeting Jesus with palm branches were saying 'come and liberate us', 'come and bring freedom from these Romans', 'come and rule and reign in our city and our hearts. Lord make us free!'

Step 3: Open out – fold down both corners into middle

Not everyone was so keen to join in the party. The Pharisees had failed to quash Jesus popularity, as they grumbled: 'the whole world is following him'. And they were, millions of pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean had gathered at Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. In addition, the crowd that had seen Lazarus raised from the dead had also joined in. Jesus was the hot ticket in town.

Step 4: Fold up together

Most kings travel in style, golden carriage, black 4x4, limo. Jesus could have chosen a chariot, he could have chosen a fine horse, and yet he chose a baby donkey. Not even a fully-grown donkey.

What does this symbol tell us about him? Here he comes your King, riding on a young donkey. What does this King bring? He brings peace, humility, grace, he does not go into the city by force, by sword or by might. Here he comes your King – on a donkey.

Step 5: Turn it upside down with folded edge into your hand and the point down.

Tear off loose side to leave 2cm / ½ inch strip.

The palm branches tell us what the crowd wanted their King to be – a liberator, to overturn the oppressive regime of the Romans, to set them free.

The donkey tells us something else. The donkey tells us this King is different. This King will not have a crown of gold but of thorns. This King will not have a throne with plump cushions, he will have a throne that is a cross.

Step 6: Open paper out into a cross

In your hands should be a cross, fashioned by your hands – a palm cross. Here comes your King – the King who made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.

The ultimate symbol of the Christian faith is the cross. What does the cross mean to us? Everything! For on the cross, Jesus shows his love, grace and power. At Easter especially we remember Jesus' death on the cross. We remember that all of our sin is taken away on the cross.

We remember that Jesus rose from the dead. I am the resurrection and the life he said!

We remember that as Jesus has been through death and is alive today, so we can live in freedom.

Freedom from the tyranny of our own hearts, freedom from addiction, freedom from negativity, freedom from sin. As Jesus rises and ascends to heaven, he leaves the door open and calls all of us to follow him now on earth and all the way to heaven.

But he calls us with this symbol – the symbol of the cross. Jesus was not a military hero, he was not that sort of King. His Kingdom is bigger. For as he humbled himself, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every

name, that every knee should bow in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father. Amen?

How do you see this symbol? Maybe your cross isn't perfectly square? It's surely ragged round the edge. Maybe it doesn't look fit for a King? Maybe you'd rather the church had a different symbol? What does the cross mean to you? A sign of shared pain and suffering, of hope, of new beginnings? Hold your cross in your hand – this is the dwelling place of God for we are his body – in our hands and in our hearts. Here is our King – our King Jesus is humble, humble like this scrap paper cross. May we acknowledge this humble Jesus is our King. May we celebrate his humility. May this symbol remind us of our need to be humble too. Humble in our expectations of these times, humble in our relationships with each other, humble in loving others first just as Jesus did. Here comes your King.