

Christ Church Freemantle Sunday 28th March – Palm Sunday

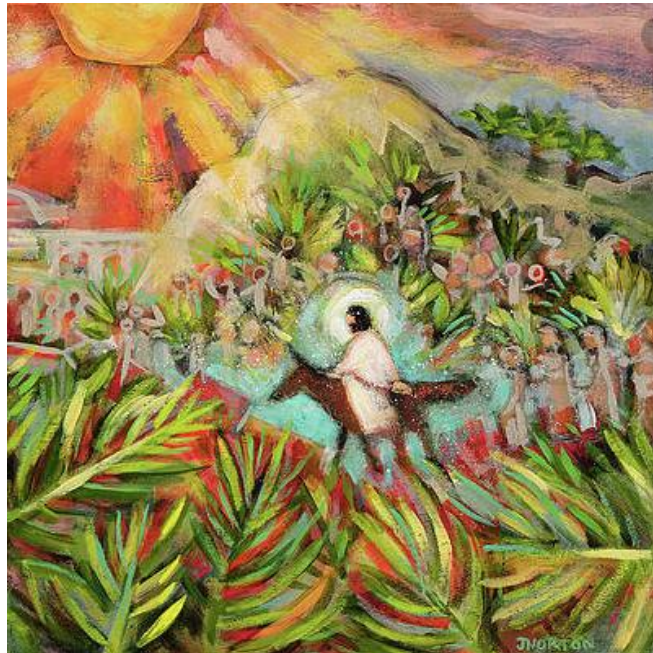
There was always an excitement about Palm Sunday in our parish of Grange-over-Sands. We met not in church but in the Parish hall, which was down in the middle of the shopping centre. Palm crosses were distributed and everyone joined in the shout:

*Hosanna to the Son of David
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
Lord!*

The Gospel story for Palm Sunday was read was read, and then, singing together, we went out into the street and, following the Cross and the choir, wound our way up the steep hill to St. Paul's on its mound high above Morecambe Bay.

*All glory, laud and honour
to thee Redeemer, King;
to whom the lips of children
their sweet Hosannas ring.*

Passing tourists would stop to watch or even join us, and old Father Jack would always be part of the procession on his mobility scooter. By the time we reached the church all but the youngest would be out of breath - though we were still singing, and the organ would join our voices (usually in a different key!) as we entered the church ready for the dramatic Reading of the Passion Story and the celebration of the Eucharist. Churches across the country will today be missing their Palm Sunday processions, with services online and no singing together. But nonetheless, as we worship at home, we remember that journey of Jesus up the hill into Jerusalem, riding on a borrowed donkey and acclaimed by the crowds, as they covered the street with palm leaves and their coats to make a carpet for the King.



Today marks the beginning of a special week for Christians, but for the second year we have to mark it in a very different way. No Palm crosses, (I've decided to keep the stick crosses we made ourselves last year until 2022, as a sign of the endurance of the Cross through the worst of human troubles) no wonderful Passiontide music, no celebration of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday.

Yet without all these human touches we are still in the presence of Him who, all those years ago, prepared for his death at Calvary. We can read the story for ourselves again, taking time to be quiet and reflect, for this year we can understand human suffering better than most of us have ever done before – it has been all around us in the immensity of these pandemic days through which we are living. Jesus who faced his own death, an execution so public and cruel, with integrity, compassion and courage, is the same Jesus who will journey beside us this week. He understands our fears and our sorrows. As we look to coming together in worship for the first time for three months on Easter Sunday, we know that it is the Cross of Jesus and his victory over death which is our ultimate salvation.

Ian Coomber