

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

PALM SUNDAY

28TH March



Christ's Entry Into Jerusalem

Jean Hippolyte Flandrin, 1842

Leading into Holy Week

On Palm Sunday we begin to mark the week of our Lord's passion. While Palm Sunday seems a day of celebration and victory it is in truth a bitter day, because the crowds that shout hosanna as Jesus enters Jerusalem would seem to be the same crowd that bays for his crucifixion by the end of the week. The perversity of collective human nature is laid bare for us to see.

Jesus has come to Jerusalem, clear that this is his destination and that it will be the site of his degradation and crucifixion. No one of his followers seems to comprehend this. Like the crowds, the disciples believe that this 'triumphant' entry is the beginning of a new political reign. This is not to be so.

We are invited to follow the action through the week as it unfolds, following on from today's reading from chapter 12 of Mark's gospel. Over the week you might like to follow the action up to the events of Good Friday. We will deliver Easter resources to you on Thursday for use on Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Pam White provides our reflection this week.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.
The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.

Psalm 118

Prayer

Loving God, at this time,
we remember that going up to Jerusalem
cost Jesus his very life.
So we come before you,
conscious of the way religious words
and holy phrases
can slip so easily from our lazy lips
and our hardened hearts.

What do we really know
of your mountainous truth,
your rock-hard integrity,
the depth of your suffering
for love of us all?
Forgive us for the shallowness
of our faith,
and the timidity of our following;
forgive us for the ready excuses
we make for going our own way
and claiming it as yours.

Turn us round again, we pray,
by your Holy Spirit,
active within us and among us.
Show us how to be open again
to your faithfulness
and to your freedom,
that we may live
new lives
And be again bearers
of the seeds of the Kingdom
of Jesus. Amen

The prophet Isaiah 50. 4-9a

The Lord God has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens—
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.
The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backwards.
I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.

The Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
It is the Lord God who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

The letter to the Philippians

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The Gospel of Mark 11. 1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, “Why are you doing this?” just say this, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.”’ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Reflecting

Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey with probably a motley crew waving branches picked from the fields. An emperor would come on a white charger, leading his soldiers, bugles blasting a fanfare and the rent -a-crowd of stalwart citizens would be cheering from the sidelines.

Jesus is humble. He opposes the pomp and wealth and power of the empire as well as the pomp and power and wealth of the Temple.

Recently we have seen the seediness of our monarchy being eroded from within by some of its own members. Despite the monarch being the Defender of the Faith and all the venerable cathedrals and chapels at its use we get little idea of Christianity from them. Their position of wealth and status denies the egalitarianism of Jesus' message.

Our Australian government, its leader espousing his Christianity, continues to exhibit ways that were never promoted by Jesus.

Jesus was compassionate, inclusive, defended the poor and the sick and the stranger and valued women. Our Government cruelly denies the human rights of refuge and asylum to the most desperate people who risk coming to us.

Our Government pursues power over justice.

It Despises the poor while rewarding the rich.

It allows corruption.

It rides roughshod over the planet's need for healing.

It Prosecutes those who would tell truths.

It is secretive and hides from the light of scrutiny.

If our government purports to be Christian, then anyone trying to gauge a sense of what Christianity is by observing this government will get a very poor idea.

But of course, this is not a new phenomenon.

It was the Christian British and other Christian Europeans who invaded and settled the supposedly empty land after 1788. They set up churches and imported clergy. They were cruel, enacting genocide towards the original peoples, shooting and poisoning and infecting them, stealing their lands, abusing their lands, overrunning the land with sheep and cattle, rabbits and foxes, camels, buffalo and pigs. They depleted the soil and farmed beyond the range that was viable and were unable to manage the burning of land. The rich squatters became richer, and the First peoples were pushed further and further to the margins of both land and settlement.

When the white settlers' penchant for using the Indigenous women for sex produced mixed race children these children were stolen from their families, denied their language and culture and spirituality. They were schooled to be servants of the white people and many were treated harshly, brutally, working often as slaves. One example of this is the children taken to Kinchilla Boys Home in NSW. They were robbed of their names and had their name replacement number punched into them, chained to a tree for bed wetting, sexually abused by staff or other boys and kicked like dogs. Can you even imagine an adult punching a child in the head to emphasize his number: Flynn or Ethan or Daniel or one of your grandchildren? Such treatment cannot be brushed over. These people live with the scars throughout their lives, and we must be able to convey to them that we are ashamed that such things happened. What depraved mindset did those abusers have, we must wonder? If they thought they were Christians, which some of them did, what in Heaven's name was their image of God?

The Australian theologian Norman Habel is from a Lutheran background and he is vitally interested in Australia becoming a better nation, particularly in its treatment of the First Peoples. He

acknowledges his family background of German settlement here and he has experienced what that has meant when Australia was at war with Germany. He is passionate about reconciliation between First peoples and later comers and couches some of his argument in Christian theology.

He poses the idea that we might regard the First peoples as being likened to the Biblical Suffering Servant. He is building on the thinking of another Australian theologian, the Catholic Veronica Brady. This is an idea that is topical to pursue at both this Holy time of Lent and Easter and as the state of Victoria enters into a deliberate phase of hearing the truth about the past with a view to Reconciliation and moving towards a Treaty in the future.

There certainly are similarities between the Suffering Servant described by Isaiah ____ despised, abused, disregarded____ and the Indigenous peoples. Yet in this suffering servant image lies the possibility of healing. This is how we have regarded Jesus' crucifixion.

We need to be very cautious I think, before we claim Indigenous history in this light. We cannot subsume their own spirituality and impose ours.

We must be very wary to avoid any sense of intentionality about this suffering.

Indigenous people were not treated grievously by white settlers in order to show God's love and forgiveness to the perpetrators. Any theology of atonement in Jesus' death, that God needed him to die in order to forgive our sins, is also suspect and delivers a very harsh picture of God.

If Jesus on the Cross is actually God on the Cross, which is actually Love on the Cross, then it is Love which is being crucified. This is Love that is self -giving and despite its death can manifest in new life.

When we have mistreated the First peoples we have failed in Love. Perhaps in recognizing this we can regard them as the Suffering Servant in so far as we are beginning to recognize our shame at the terrible guilt of the past treatment of the First peoples. Yes, you may say, we did not do it, but we are the beneficiaries of it.

If we are to hold our Christian faith, our following of Jesus' way seriously, then we would need to examine ourselves and how we might have behaved in earlier generations. Would we have stood against the dreadful actions of our ancestors?

We must hope that we would have and our only way to make good that hope is in how we behave today.

We can wonder at how there ever came to be Aboriginal and Islander Christians. How did they come to understand God in Jesus? Surely there must have been some missionaries who were able to present Jesus as coming to proclaim good news to the poor, the release of captives, the restoration of sight to the blind , freedom for the oppressed . Some must have exercised some sense of love to these people.

If the First peoples offer forgiveness and a willingness to work together with us for a better future we will indeed be blessed. But we must not expect such forgiveness as our automatic due. We cannot move forward together until the pain and suffering and the anger it has engendered has been properly acknowledged and some sort of reparation worked out.

Reparation may not be in terms of wealth but might be manifest in respect, empathy, generosity and understanding. It will need to involve equality and the interconnectedness of the various peoples who now live in this land.

The Philippians reading challenges the acceptance and use of power. It should not be used to silence people who have been abused or oppressed but rather stands as a framework for those who could come in riding on their stallion of power to actually reconsider and come riding on a borrowed donkey.

Jesus came to reconcile. His passion was for God's Kingdom This passion drew him to Jerusalem where the other meaning of his passion, i.e., his death, took place because others, the powers of Empire and Temple did not share his vision, God's vision. Resurrection after the cross is the Divine refusal to hold our rebellion, our falling short of the vision of God's kingdom, against us.

If the First peoples can see the way forward to forgiveness then they would indeed be an example of the Suffering Servant, bigger than, greater than, more generous than those who persecuted and decimated them. They will indeed be Christ-like whether or not they believe him to be God.

If Australia is to be a truly multicultural nation, we will need to acknowledge the many Indigenous nations who were its first custodians and all who came later, be we of British, European, Asian or African descent. We will honour and respect the land and work to heal it. Sudanese born Melbourne lawyer Nyadol Nyuon says we will have to stop using our parliaments and boardrooms, courts and media to prop up the unsustainable myth of European supremacy.

We will have an appreciation of the interconnectedness of people and land, rivers, rocks and sea and air and of all things spiritual, be that of the Indigenous Spirituality or our Christian faith or indeed other faiths that enhance people's lives. Once we reach a point of reconciliation with the oldest civilization on earth and all of us later comers, we may well be close to Jesus' vision of God's Kingdom.

We, as the church, have a role in influencing our government. It can be a strong role. Some will march on this Palm Sunday to demonstrate their care for others and the land. We will continue to support refugees. We will go on learning about and better understanding the ways of Indigenous people as we listen to their stories, express sorrow for past wrongs and take some leadership from their ways for the future.

In this way hopefully the world will see within us and our actions, the one whom we follow, the one humble enough to ride a donkey, courageous enough to allow himself to be killed and powerful enough to offer new life.

Amen

Prayer – prepared by Heather Baxter

In 2004 Lin Hafield Dodds wrote:

“I carry a smooth prayer stone in my pocket. I was given it as a tangible reminder of ‘God-with-me’. I carry it with me in my advocacy work at Parliament House.

In my other pocket I carry a jagged piece of road fill. This piece of rough, un-polished stone reminds me...when I am in that polished environment of the those who are pushed to the edges, poor, or living in violent situations, who need encouragement and resources to be able to move towards a different life.”¹

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he knew the power mongers of government and synagogue would be challenged to respond in some form or another.

Let us pray:

We reflect on the news from Australia's Parliament House over the last month.

We thank you God, for the voices that have spoken out against the power mongers in Canberra at great cost to themselves. We pray that the conversations that have started regarding the culture of abuse of power and lack of respect will continue across the nation and in all communities.

We pray for the First Nations peoples of this land. They have made a stand – “calling out” the lack of respect and compassion they have experienced both in the past and also today. They call for justice for their people from those who hold power – we, the Second Peoples of this land.

We pray that you will melt our hearts so that we will be able to show respect to all your people. Show us when and where we are needed to help to carry the cross of someone else who is crying out for justice.

Lord remind us of the two stones we can be carrying – the smooth one that assures us that you are with us, and the rough hard stone to remind us of those who need our love and care.

Our Father in Heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done
On earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever Amen

Blessing

Lord of life, you walk this journey with us and through us;
Lead us Lord, lead on.

Journeying within, and wrestling in the world,
Lead us Lord, lead on.

Lead us to risk, to grow, and to tread the path you have opened for us;
Lead us Lord, lead on.

And let us rejoice that every place is your place.
In the name of Christ, the Risen One. Amen

Quote from Lynn Hatfield-Dodds: "Space for God's Glory" Mission Prayer Handbook 2004
(National Assembly UCA) P. 48.

Christ's Entry Into Jerusalem (detail), *Jean Hippolyte Flandrin, 1842, fresco*, Church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris

Early prayer: John Harvey, Eggs and Ashes, Wild Goose Worship Working Group

Lead us on Lord: Eggs and Ashes, Wild Goose Worship Working Group

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NEWS AND NOTICES

PATHFINDER MATERIAL

A reminder message from Dianne and Gary,

Hi everyone, It's time to prepare the April (Easter) edition of Pathfinder. Please send your material to us by 6.00 p.m. on Monday 29/3. Timelines are a little tight this month due to Easter, so it would really be appreciated if you can send material through as soon as possible.

We'd love to have info about any coming events you are organising for April and May to give people lots of notice. Also reflections on the past month and Lent - perhaps the Meditative Walks or the Thursday evening studies, something in worship or our reflections on indigenous. Hoping to get lots of contributions!

MAUNDY THURSDAY – SEDER MEAL

Next Thursday night, the 1st April, on Maundy Thursday, we have the opportunity to have the Passover meal, known as the Seder, explained to us. We will then share in a light, COVID-compliant, meal together. We are privileged to be led in this by Pam Spiegel from the Etz Chayim Synagogue in East Bentleigh. You may remember Pam from Multi-faith October in 2018. It will be wonderful to welcome her again. This will be an exciting and informative event and one which we hope will build closer connection with and understanding of our Jewish neighbours.

To be held: **Thursday 1st April, 6.30pm in the North Road Hall.** Bookings are essential.
RSVP to the Church Office by 6pm on Monday 29/3
office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

SUNDAY EVENING WALKS DURING LENT

As part of our Lenten observance this year you are invited to take part in the final meditative walk this Sunday evening. We gather at Allnutt Park on Wheatley Road at 6pm and are given a provocation and question to reflect on as we walk. We will gather at the Wright Street Rotunda near the centre of the park. Enquiries to: Ron Townsend.

PALM SUNDAY - WALK FOR REFUGEES

Walk for Justice for Refugees today (Palm Sunday 28th March) is an important opportunity to raise awareness of the continuing injustice and cruelty experienced by refugees and people who are seeking asylum. This year Palm Sunday actions are calling for:

- Provide Permanent Protection
- Provide Family Reunion
- Provide Safety Net Support in the community (access to Jobseeker)
- End Mandatory Detention
- End Offshore – bring the refugees here or take up the NZ offer to resettlement offer

When: Today Sunday 28 March, 1:30 PM (AEST)

Where: State Library of Victoria, 328 Swanston Street, Melbourne

Speakers include:

- Julian Burnside AO, QC - long standing Refugee advocate and civil liberties lawyer
- Mostafa Azimbitar (Moz from Manus) - freed Medevac refugee
- Faith Communities Council of Victoria representatives
- Sr Brigid Arthur - Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
- Rally Chairs: Michele O'Neil - President Australian Council of Trade Unions & Ahmad Hakim - Refugee Voices

On Palm Sunday people from cities and towns around Australia will be holding rallies and vigils to call for Justice and a Fair Go for Refugees.

You can support justice for refugees by attending on the day and joining and sharing this event on social media.

This event will be COVIDsafe, please wear a mask, and register with our QR codes on the day.

ROSTER for Good Friday 2 April 2021

READING	Kristina Parish	
PRAYERS	David Northwood	
DOOR DUTY	Warwick Barry	Brenda Grootendorst
SOUND	Gary Richter	
COUNTING	Marg Davis	Brian Moore
MUSIC	Peter Hurley	
RESOURCES DELIVERY (Thurs 1 April)	Ron Townsend	Includes delivery of all Easter worship documents

ROSTER for Easter Sunday 4 April 2021

READING	Warwick Barry	
PRAYERS	Marg Davis	
COMMUNION	Mardie Townsend	Lorraine Denniston
DOOR DUTY	Gary Richter	Hans Tilstra
SOUND	Robyn Mulder	
COUNTING	Graeme Davenport	Brian Moore
FLOWERS	Robyn Mulder	
MUSIC	Peter Hurley	

Are you interested in exploring Aboriginal issues?

Here are some ideas:

Movies:

1. "In My Blood it Runs". – movie ABC iView

Confronting movie about a small lad's life as an indigenous boy. . Definitely worth viewing.

2. "Samson and Delilah" – movie (Google Play)

Two teenagers find love and look for a place where they can be together in peace in this comedy drama from Australia.

3. "First Australians" – series SBS On Demand

An opportunity to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice issues and the true history of this land now called Australia.

Read/Borrow (Heather and David have a copy of these):

1. "Dark Emu" – Bruce Pascoe
2. "Young Dark Emu" – Bruce Pascoe
3. "Finding our Heart" – Thomas Mayor

Act:

To stop Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Resources and template letter –

https://www.commongrace.org.au/key_event_resources

Pray:

Collated prayers and blessings written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians as well as prayeers for First NBations Peoples written by non-indigenous Christians –

https://www.commongrace.org.au/aboriginal_prayer_resources