

# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



2 APRIL 2023

PALM SUNDAY



# WORSHIP AT HOME

*This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.*

*Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.*

*Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.*

## HYMN: TIS 768(i), Praise God from whom all blessings flow...

### Prayer for today

#### **Humble Palm Sunday Congregational Prayer (Carol Penner)**

Holy Jesus,  
you come to meet us in humble ways.  
You meet us in the lengthening of the light.  
You meet us in the fragrance of the earth, melting.  
You meet us in the delicate petals of the first yellow crocus blossom.  
You meet us in the first bee we see.  
This year we will look for little signs of life, not passing them by,  
but stopping and giving thanks for your presence in the beauty of our world.  
Your holy presence is all around us.

Thank you for this congregation gathered to worship,  
and for way you have shaped us into a loving supportive community  
reaching out to those in need.  
Thank you for showing us the joy of losing ourselves and finding your strength.  
We need strength this week to love our families,  
to be kind at work even when we are tired,  
and to give to our community, even when we feel we have nothing to give.  
We come to you in humility because we are not a perfect people.  
We know what's right and we would like to do it,  
but we feel that road is too hard, and too costly.

Forgive us for cheering you on your lonely road  
while we take the easy way.  
We love a humble Saviour riding a donkey,  
but we want the best things, and honour without responsibility.  
Today we pray for all who are tempted by power:  
for our political leaders with many followers who will do anything to stay popular;  
for those with great financial resources, who only want to use it for themselves;

for those with power over vulnerable people, who hurt those in their care.  
You know how each one of us is being tempted in our own life:  
In this moment of silence we meet you at our own crossroads,  
we feel your great tender love for us and listen to your voice... [Silence]

Thank you that you don't just show us the way,  
you are the way, and you empower us to follow you.  
We follow you together, with hosannas in our hearts.  
In Jesus' holy name we pray, Amen.

## Confession

### **Song of peace Confessional Prayer (Carol Penner)**

Lord, we come in prayer to you burdened with our unhappy business:  
all the deeds done under the sun that we would rather not remember,  
the sound of sin in our world.

The explosions caused by bombs made in our own factories.  
The cries of the hungry that are not fed in our own communities.  
Our own hurtful words hurled at those we love.

The echoing silence of creatures who we have driven to extinction.  
Hearer of all, you know too clearly the sorrows of our world!  
Forgive us our sins, and help us right the wrongs we've done.

Give us words of repentance to share with those we've wronged,  
ringing courage to stand up for the voiceless creatures of the world  
and a resounding love for the lowest and the least.

Most of all, tune our ears to the voice of Jesus,  
so that always and everywhere we might hear  
his song of peace for every creature under the sun.

### **Assurance Of Forgiveness**

Brothers and sisters, God does not leave us in our distress. He does not abandon us to our devilish decisions. While we choose to starve ourselves on a diet of our own making and choosing that leads to spiritual atrophy and deterioration, God provides us with the Bread of Life. Pursuing us, those who have rejected the wisdom of God, Jesus declares of himself in John 6:51, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, they will live forever." The bread that he gives is for the life of the world, for you and me. It is his very body pierced and broken which reunites us to the wisdom, truth, life and light of God. In Him and through Him, we are forgiven. Amen.

Scott Bullock  
Inspired by John 6:51-58

## HYMN: TIS 12, Ye gates, lift up your heads on high...

# Scripture

## From the Hebrew Bible

### Isaiah 50:4-9a

#### **The Servant's Humiliation and Vindication**

4 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.

5 The Lord God has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious,  
I did not turn backwards.

6 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.

7 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;

8 he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together.

Who are my adversaries?

Let them confront me.

9 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.

## From the New Testament

### Matthew 21:1-11

#### **Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem**

21When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' 4This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

5 'Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

6The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

10When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' 11The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

## HYMN: TIS 348, Ride on, ride on in majesty...

### A Pastoral Letter:

**Sermon to be preached at Ormond Uniting Church on Sunday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2023. Refer to the readings from Isaiah and Matthew above:**

#### **Being really annoying.**

We are encouraged to read scripture with a straight face. Scripture is not a laughing matter. Scripture is life and death stuff. Scripture is the "Word of God", and when God speaks we must pay attention with the greatest respect. But Jesus, who knew his scriptures really well, and was able to quote from them at length from memory (it is possible that he could not read nor write), was well able to treat them with a degree of irony. Can we see in our mind's eye a picture of Jesus teaching with a smile on his face and asking his audience "Do you get it?" "Do you get the joke?" There are certainly times when Jesus though his audience was knowledgeable enough to "get it", and that words were not necessary. Jesus understood the power of the living parable. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a baby donkey was probably a case of a living parable. It was, I believe, a contrived and stage-managed event. Jesus has already arrange for the foal to be available on demand. And Jesus seems confident that the people, or at least some of them, will be familiar with the following passage from the Chapter 9 from the prophet Zechariah book. Here it is:

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the warhorse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle-bow shall be cut off,

and **he shall command peace** to the nations;  
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah 9:9-10

Five hundred or so year before Jesus' time Zechariah announces the coming of a king (read 'messiah'), who will be unlike our common-or-garden understanding of what a king is like. Normally, kings bring about strife (for the good of the nation, of course). This king will command peace ("speak peace" in the words of the King James version), and he will speak peace to "the nations" Not just the Jews. Not in words but in actions Jesus is saying: "Remember Zechariah. Well, its all happening. The good king is here. See? Nudge-nudge-wink-wink say no more. Get it?" And probably a large part of the crowd did get it. For a while at least. But there is something else to get.

Jesus looks ridiculous. He sits on a baby donkey, feet dragging on the ground. It's not that he can't afford a horse. If he wanted to ride a horse he could have managed to get one. This is the guy who brought Lazarus back to life. This is the guy who changed water into wine. This is the guy who made blind folk see. Surely, this guy could have managed to get a horse – or maybe even a chariot.

This event, in all likelihood, is a stage-managed parody directed at the Romans. We don't find the details of this in the Bible, but it is now known that the Governor of Judea (Pontius Pilate) was in the habit of entering Jerusalem (by another gate) with his troops, and declaring that the "Son of God" (The Emperor Augustus) was in charge and would bring prosperity to Judea. The contemporary theologians Markus Borg and John Domenic Crossan have, through their research, drawn this Roman custom to our attention. Another contemporary theologian (Debbie Thomas) has given an account of this Borg and Crossan's research in her own words:

*Here is Borg and Crossan's description of Pontius Pilate's imperial procession: "A visual panoply of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armour, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. Sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful."*

*It's important to remember that according to Roman imperial belief, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome; he was the Son of God. For the empire's Jewish subjects, Pilate's procession signalled more than a military threat. It was the embodiment of a rival theology. Heresy on horseback.*

*This is the background, Borg and Crossan argue, against which we need to frame the Triumphal Entry of Jesus. That Jesus planned a counter-procession is clear from St. Mark's account of the event. Jesus knew he was going to enter the city on the back of a donkey; he had already made arrangements to procure one.*

*As Pilate clanged and crashed his imperial way into Jerusalem from the west, Jesus approached from the east, looking (by contrast) ragtag and absurd. His was the procession of the ridiculous, the powerless, the explicitly vulnerable. As Borg and Crossan remark, "What we often call the triumphal entry was actually an anti-imperial, anti-triumphal one, a*

*deliberate lampoon of the conquering emperor entering a city on horseback through gates opened in abject submission."*

*Elsewhere, Crossan notes that Jesus rode "the most unthreatening, most un-military mount imaginable: a female nursing donkey with her little colt trotting along beside her."*

*In fact, Jesus was drawing on the rich, prophetic symbolism of the Jewish Bible in his choice of mount. The prophet Zechariah predicted the ride of a king "on a colt, the foal of a donkey." He would be the nonviolent king who'd "command peace to the nations."*

Debbie Thomas

It seems that the powers-that-be did "get it". Within days Jesus would be dead!

So, on this Palm Sunday, do we "get it"? Is the joke on us? Do we miss the point about The Prince of Peace? As followers of The Prince of Peace are we prepared to look ridiculous? Remember that St Paul was prepared to pronounce The Gospel a foolishness. Could all our talk about love, and forgiveness and hope and redemption and a saviour be, in the long run, so annoying that there is a reaction and a price to pay?

And when, in a few minutes, we gather around the table and assert that we are living out the very essence of community – is that a foolishness that the powers-that-be will not abide. Remember Archbishop Romero in El Salvador, shot down while presiding at communion.

Are we prepared to make sacrifices above and beyond? How important to us; how important to the world, is all this foolishness? Now, there is a question for Palm Sunday. Are we prepared to be really, really, really and truly annoying? Now there is a question for Easter!

May it be so.

## HYMN: TIS 607, Make me a channel of your peace

Prayer – David Northwood

### **Palm Sunday**

#### **If not for your Embrace of Death...**

When the truth-twisting accusations were spat in Your face, Jesus,  
when the crowds chanted their execution-call,  
when the nails forced their way through Your flesh,  
Things could have been very different,  
if not for Your embrace of death.

But, You knew that love would lead to the cross,  
it always does,  
to laying down life for the beloved.

and you embraced Your death willingly  
inviting us to follow.  
So, if not for Your embrace of death,  
we could never know what it is  
to love those who don't deserve it;  
we could never find the anger  
to resist the injustice that steals dignity;  
we could never have our hearts broken  
at the grief and need of strangers;  
we could never risk ourselves  
to challenge violence, corruption and abuse.

But, in answer to Your call, we follow You  
into the embrace of death,  
laying down our lives in small acts of prayer,  
service and justice,  
allowing the suffering of others into our hearts.

And so we pray for refugees, the world over, people like ourselves, who face unimaginable challenges, hardship, and uncertainty in a world in turmoil. We pray that your compassion might help them to find new homes and settled lives amongst the places they find themselves in.

We pray also, for our First Peoples at this time, for their fragile hopes, and misgivings about the referendum for The Voice, and we ask that your Spirit may turn the hearts of the wider Australian population to support this hope for a better future together.

Finally, we pray also for ourselves as part of your church in the world, we ask that you, Lord Jesus, may continue to journey with us in the hard places of our lives, in facing the things that we dread and that plague us in our waking, and resting moments; may your presence, surpassing peace and grace, enable us to walk the path you have called us on, and endure all things lovingly.

And we ask that in some small way,  
our expressions of love and sacrifice,  
may bring greater wholeness and speed your healing love into our world.  
We ask all these things in the Holy name of Jesus,  
Amen.

(Source : Sacredise adapted )



# Blessing

Go from here  
singing hosannas  
all the way home.  
Do not be afraid,  
Jesus is walking with you.

## HYMN: TIS 607 Make me a channel of your peace...

## Thoughts for the week to come

### Coming to a City Near You

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.  
Jesus comes to the gate, to the synagogue,  
to houses prepared for wedding parties,  
to the pools where people wait to be healed,  
to the temple where lambs are sold,  
to gardens, beautiful in the moonlight.  
He comes to the governor's palace.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you,  
to new subdivisions and trailer parks,  
to penthouses and basement apartments,  
to the factory, the hospital and the Cineplex,  
to the big box outlet centre and to churches,  
with the same old same old message,  
unchanged from the beginning of time.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you  
with his Good News and...  
Hope erupts! Joy springs forth!  
The very stones cry out,  
“Hosanna in the highest,  
blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

The crowds jostle and push,  
they can't get close enough!  
People running alongside flinging down their coats before him!  
Jesus, the parade marshal, waving, smiling.  
The paparazzi elbow for room,  
looking for that perfect picture for the headline,  
“The Man Who Would Be King”.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you  
and gets the red carpet treatment.

Children waving real palm branches from the florist,  
silk palm branches and  
palms made from green construction paper.  
Hosannas ringing in churches, chapels, cathedrals,  
in monasteries, basilicas and tent-meetings.  
King Jesus, honoured in a thousand hymns  
in Canada, Cameroon, Calcutta and Canberra.  
We LOVE this great big powerful capital K King Jesus  
coming in glory and splendour and majesty  
and awe and power and might.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.  
Kingly, he takes a towel and washes feet.  
With majesty, he serves bread and wine.  
With honour, he prays all night.  
With power, he puts on chains.  
Jesus, King of all creation, appears in state  
in the eyes of the prisoner, the AIDS orphan, the crack addict,  
asking for one cup of cold water,  
one coat shared with someone who has none,  
one heart, yours,  
and a second mile.  
Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.  
Can you see him?

Carol Penner

For more worship resources from Carol Penner, visit her website [Leading in Worship](#).

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# Postlude

*You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.*

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Presider: Karel Reus

Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES