



PALM SUNDAY A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

263 STF – Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest! OR

61 STF – Our God is a great big God

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

77 STF – Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King OR

766 STF – Santo, santo, santo

Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11

Hymn:

483 STF – We are marching in the light of God OR

264 STF – Make way, make way for Christ the King

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

284 STF – There is a green hill far away OR

277 STF – My song is love unknown

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

265 STF – Ride on, ride on in majesty! OR

789 STF – Holy, holy, holy Lord

Blessing

Call to worship

Lord of light,
Shine into the midst of this day,
Bring us life and light and hope and joy as we worship you, we pray

Amen.¹

Hymn:

263 STF – Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest! OR
61 STF – Our God is a great big God

Opening Prayers

Heavenly Love,
As we come together this morning to worship, we give our thanks to you.

All: We give thanks to you, for you are good; your love endures forever.

Leader: We thank you for your enduring love and your ongoing presence in lives that can all just feel too much sometimes.

All: We give thanks to you, for you are good; your love endures forever.

Leader: We give thanks for those closest to us. For the overwhelming love we feel for them and for the tenderness of our hearts.

All: We give thanks to you, for you are good; your love endures forever.

Leader: We give thanks for the differences between ourselves and our neighbours. For the lessons we can learn and the richness of the world we can begin to understand through one another. Through this, we understand love even more deeply.

All: We give thanks to you, for you are good; your love endures forever.

Leader: We give thanks for all that surrounds us - the trees, birds, animals, oceans, hills and places still unknown. For the reminder that we are one with creation and that creation is at one with you.

All: We give thanks to you, for you are good; your love endures forever.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

All Age Talk

[Readings used here are from Matthew 21: 1-11, shown below from the Message. Feel free to use or replace with a version you are comfortable with.]

[Prep: Source the following images: Photo of the runners at the London Marathon, Photo of Wembley Stadium, Aragorn from The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King on a horse, Jesus on a Donkey]

Today is the start of a very busy week for the church! We have the end of Lent, Jesus being betrayed, crucified, a day of uncertainty, then Jesus rising again on Easter Sunday morning. Yet, before all that: We have two donkeys.

By this stage in Jesus' ministry he had amassed a following of not only disciples beyond the 12 that we readily know of, but after travelling around villages and towns inspiring people and challenging the status quo they started to follow Jesus!

Now, everyone was gathering in the city of Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, which commemorates the slaves leaving Egypt; which meant that there were a so many people travelling to and being around Jerusalem.

To put this in numbers:

The City of Jerusalem, around the times of Jesus, reportedly had around 30,000 – 50,000 people who lived in and around the city normally. Or to put it this way: The population is the same or slightly less than the amount of people who ran the London Marathon in 2025.

During the Passover Festival, that population would have increased by around 100,000 to 200,000 people according to historians. Or to put it this way: That is two full Wembley Stadiums moving into the city for Passover!

At the same time: To make sure that this part of the Roman empire was defended well and that order was kept in Jerusalem, the Romans sent a Legion to the city to keep law and order. A Roman legion was around 5,000 soldier marching into the city as well.

With all that in mind, lets hear about those donkeys:

When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: "Go over to the village across from you. You'll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, say, 'The Master needs them!' He will send them with you.

The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted.

Jesus was seen by many people as a leader of people; a person who rallied people to stand up to oppression. A person who challenged publicly those who oppressed others. Who stood up for what was good and true and pointed out when people were being unfair or horrible to other people. A leader at that time with a large following, such as a King or a General, would have entered a city on the back of a majestic horse or something larger like an elephant!

Instead...Jesus arrived on a humble Donkey.

Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as

a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, “Hosanna to David’s son!” “Blessed is he who comes in God’s name!” “Hosanna in highest heaven!”

As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, “What’s going on here? Who is this?”

The parade crowd answered, “This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Imagine this: A city that has tens of thousands of people in and around the city. Some don’t know of Jesus, some do and are excited to see and hear from him; and there are those that are scared of what Jesus could be doing here. At one gate of the City there are thousands of soldiers entering the city to keep the peace, to support those in power. At the other gate: one man, riding a donkey and leading it’s colt alongside it into the city.

This was the start of a busy week for Jesus, and it all started with a busy city being unnerved about a man riding into a city on the back of a donkey.

Let us pray.

Loving God, in the excitement of this holy week may we not be unnerved or apprehensive, but know that you entered the city in humility and peace; and that we may be like that in our lives.

Amen.³

Hymn:

77 STF – Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King OR
766 STF – Santo, santo, santo

Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11

Hymn:

483 STF – We are marching in the light of God OR
264 STF – Make way, make way for Christ the King

Reflections on the readings

Palm Sunday always arrives with a strange energy: it’s joyful, full of movement, shouting, branches waving; and yet we know where this road leads.

We begin Holy Week not in silence, but in celebration. Not in mourning, but in song.

And that contrast is important, because the story we tell today is not simple, and it never was. Palm Sunday asks us to hold joy and discomfort together. Hope and

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

misunderstanding. Amongst our praise, we ask the question: ‘what kind of hope we are really cheering for?’

Matthew tells us that when Jesus enters Jerusalem, the city is in turmoil. ‘Who is this?’ the people ask. And the crowds answer with confidence: ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’ They spread cloaks on the road. They wave branches. They shout ‘Hosanna’ (save us now)!

But we need to be honest about what many in that crowd were hoping for.

Jerusalem was under Roman occupation. Taxes were crushing. Violence was never far away. People were desperate for change.

So when they shout ‘Hosanna,’ they’re not just offering religious praise, they’re crying out for liberation. For rescue. For a leader who will finally put things right.

And that’s where the tension begins.

Jesus enters the city, not on a warhorse, not with weapons, not surrounded by soldiers: but on a donkey.

It’s a deliberate, symbolic choice, a quiet but unmistakable statement.

This is not the image of power the world expects. This is not how revolutions usually begin. Jesus is enacting a different vision of leadership, one rooted not in domination, but in humility; not in force, but in faithfulness.

And here’s the uncomfortable truth: Many in the crowd appear to praise Jesus for who they hope he will be; not yet for who he actually is.

They cheer for a king who will overthrow Rome. But Jesus will confront something deeper: the systems of violence, exclusion, and fear that live not only in empires, but in human hearts.

Which brings us to our other reading: Psalm 118 gives voice to the joy of praise and worship, with one of the most quoted lines from the Old Testament, ‘This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.’

But this is not a naïve celebration, rather this psalm is proclaimed by someone who has known struggle, rejection, and danger. Later it says: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.’ As so often, the psalmist blends praise with grief, pain, uncertainty and doubt. This is not a ‘happy clappy, praise-God-and-everything-will-be-alright kind of faith’. It is much more interesting, much more complex, and much more honest than that.

Here on Palm Sunday, as we wave our ‘hosannas’, we already know the story is pointing us toward rejection, toward the truth that God’s way often looks like failure before it looks like victory.

The psalm reminds us that praise is not pretending everything is fine, it is choosing trust in the middle of uncertainty.

The tragedy of Holy Week is not just that the crowd turns on Jesus, it is that they misunderstood him from the very beginning. They want power without vulnerability, victory without sacrifice, change without transformation.

And Jesus refuses all of that.

He will not become the kind of king they expected —or the kind of king we often want. Because Jesus does not come to dominate Rome, or set up a new empire in his name. Rather, he comes to expose violence, even when it wears religious clothing. He comes to

disrupt systems that benefit the powerful at the expense of the vulnerable. He comes to embody love that is willing to suffer rather than make others suffer.

That is not the salvation many were hoping for. And if we're honest, perhaps it still isn't, 2,000 years later.

Palm Sunday asks us a hard question:

- 'For what are we shouting our 'hosannas'?
- What kind of saviour are we hoping Jesus will be?

Are we looking for a saviour who confirms our assumptions? Who fits in with our plans? Who fixes problems without changing us? Who takes sides exactly where we already stand? Or one who calls us into deeper compassion, uncomfortable truth, and costly love?

In our world today – shaped by political polarisation, fear of the other, economic anxiety, and environmental crisis – the temptation to look for strong, simple answers is powerful.

Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus does not offer easy solutions, he offers a different way.

The road from palms to the cross is short. The same city that shouts 'Hosanna' will soon shout 'Crucify.' The way ahead is not easy, and not because Jesus failed; but because he refused to become what people wanted him to be.

And yet, he keeps going. He rides into Jerusalem knowing what awaits him. Knowing the cost. Knowing that love will not be repaid with gratitude.

That is the kind of king we meet today. One whose courage is rooted in compassion, whose power is revealed in vulnerability, whose reign is marked not by fear, but by faithfulness.

So today, we wave our palms, but we do so with eyes open.

We praise Jesus not because he meets our expectations, but because he challenges them. We follow him not because the road is easy, but because it leads toward truth, justice, and life.

As we enter Holy Week, may we walk this path honestly, holding joy and grief together, trusting that even when the crowd misunderstands, even when we misunderstand, God's love is still at work.

'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord,' pouring love out into the whole world, this Passontide and every single day.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

284 STF – There is a green hill far away OR

277 STF – My song is love unknown

Prayers of intercession

As we remember Jesus' journey into Jerusalem, with palms in our hands and questions in our hearts, let us bring our prayers to the God whose love meets us in hope and in struggle.

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

[Pause]

God of peace, we pray for a world that longs to shout Hosanna, but so often finds itself crying out in pain.

We pray for places where violence and injustice still rule;

- for communities living under occupation or oppression,
- for all caught in the cycles of war,
- for those whose lives are shaped by fear rather than freedom.

We remember especially those in Palestine, in Ukraine, in Yemen, in South Sudan, and in all places where peace feels distant.

Challenge systems of power that crush the vulnerable.

Strengthen those who work for reconciliation, justice, and healing.

God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Jesus, you entered the city riding not in triumph, but in humility.

We pray for all who feel pushed to the edges of society:

- for refugees and asylum seekers,
- for people experiencing poverty or homelessness,
- for those who are excluded because of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, or belief.

May your Church never be a crowd that misunderstands your way, but a community that makes space, listens deeply, and walks alongside those who are hurting.

God of compassion, hear our prayer.

God of our everyday lives, we pray for our country in a time of division and uncertainty.

For leaders in government and public life, that they may choose integrity over ambition, and justice over short-term gain.

For all who serve the common good: healthcare workers, teachers, carers, volunteers, and those working quietly to hold communities together.

Bless our local neighbourhood: our streets, schools, shops, and shared spaces. Help us notice where love is already at work among us, and give us courage to join in.

God of faithfulness, hear our prayer.

God of truth, as we enter Holy Week, we pray for your Church.

- Where we are tempted to follow Jesus only when it is easy, challenge us.
- Where we avoid the cost of love, teach us courage.
- Where we mistake popularity for faithfulness, call us back to your way.

Make us a people who do more than wave palms, a people willing to walk the road of compassion, justice, and peace.

God of wisdom, hear our prayer.

God who knows rejection and grief, we pray for all who are struggling today.

For the sick and the dying, for those who mourn, for the anxious and the overwhelmed, for anyone who feels abandoned or afraid.

[Silence may be kept, or names spoken]

May they know your presence beside them, and may we be attentive to their needs.

God of tenderness, hear our prayer.

God of this Holy Week, prepare us for the days ahead: not with easy answers, but with deeper love, steadfast hope, and courage to follow.

God who walks with us, hear our prayer.

We pray these prayers in the name of Jesus, who comes not in power but in love, and who journeys with us through suffering into life, and life in all its fullness.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

We have received so much, O God.

Today, we wave our palm branches in worship, let us also make the more difficult commitment – to give to you our lives, our choices, our potential, our hopes and our dreams.

Accept them, and these humble gifts, freely given, in Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

265 STF – Ride on, ride on in majesty! OR

789 STF – Holy, holy, holy Lord

Blessing

Ride on, ride on to face the challenges of this holy and painful week,
Ride on to meet them, knowing Christ is alongside, within and before you,
Ride on to seek to challenge, transform and love the world, through the blessing of the
Holy Spirit,

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker