Palm Sunday 2020

Reading: **Luke 19:37-40**

In years to come, we may well remember Palm Sunday 2020 as being unique because we will not gather to remember it. But our we will not overlook or diminish our need of God; when we celebrate Christ’s arrival to claim His throne in circumstances least expected even by the people of God, let us not forget why He did this and what it cost; even in our absence from one another today, let us not be silenced in our worship and praise.

SONG: ‘Breathe’

BIBLE READING: **Luke 9:51-62**

PRAYER

Mighty God, eternal Father,

Our times are in Your hands.

This day we proclaim together that we are content that this is so.

We submit ourselves to Your will, and entrust ourselves to Your mercy.

Watch over our days and nights, our health and our illness;

Guide our choices, our actions and our words;

Be our Guardian for all time and place.

If this be so, Father, then nothing shall ever separate us from your love and keeping.

May Your unending presence be our peace and our joy for such a time as this.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SONG: ‘Above All’

REFLECTION

Just recently supermarkets, banks, insurance companies have been emailing regularly to tell us how concerned they are for society and what they intend to do to help. Most of these, I’ve noticed, begin with a statement something like, ‘We are living in unprecedented times.’

We are indeed, but not, I think, because nothing like this has ever happened before; but unprecedented in the sheer scale of the response to this destructive virus - a response which has radically changed our lifestyle, and of which we are always aware due to the fact that instant media communication has become woven into the fabric of our daily living. We can see models of how the next several months might look in terms of how long we may feel the effects of the coronavirus, and the information placed before us plays a part in informing our actions; but there is no certainty, and there are very few fact-based confident predictions. In this climate of unpredictability, we hear the message that so much depends on what we choose to do and not to do: self-imposed restrictions and discipline will be vital to how the future unfolds. Personal choices are likely to affect others.

First-century Jews also lived in unprecedented times. Palestine was a crucible of oppression, anger, zeal and expectation; and into this crucible steps Jesus, proclaiming ‘the year of the Lord’s favour,’ healing, teaching and manifesting the holiness and authority of God. God had interrupted the usual business of humanity in a once-for-all-time intervention, to offer an eternal solution to everything that is unholy. Yet what would unfold hinged on his personal decision.

Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus, born to be Saviour, Deliverer, born to instil peace and joy into every heart open to Him, would achieve none of this unless He chose to do whatever it takes, at whatever cost, to see the divine plan carried through.

Luke tells us about a moment when Jesus decided. There would be other moments of possible opt-out; but here in chapter 9 of his gospel, Luke tells us that Jesus began to make preparations for what would come. He was decisive. The GNB and CEV say that ‘he made up his mind’, but that doesn’t do justice to the mental fortitude and passion with which Jesus set out to save and deliver you and me, and the world.

The NIV and NLT are better, telling us that Jesus ‘resolutely set out for Jerusalem.’ But the KJ and NKJ translations absolutely underline that passionate commitment to our cause. ‘…*when the time had come for Him to be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem*.’

Every generation has its fears, its existential struggles, its search for true identity and its crisis moments when lives change. Some even experience those moments when there is a tectonic shift in society itself.

To the disciples, the times seemed apocalyptic, the cause seemed lost, the Messiah seemed powerless. But as the following days would prove, nothing was as it seemed.

Even as he set his face steadfastly towards Jerusalem, Jesus may have been making practical arrangements. But he always had you in mind.

‘Crucified, laid behind the stone,

You lived to die, rejected and alone;

Like a rose trampled on the ground’

You took the fall and thought of me

Above all.