

Sunday 13 April – Palm Sunday

Sermon by The Reverend Dave Chesney, Area Dean of Newham

As there is no sermon at St. Luke's today as it is replaced by the reading of the Passion, the sermon from the Cathedral is replicated below. If you would like to listen to the sermon, an audio version can be accessed at chelmsford.anglican.org/publications/weekly-sermons/weekly-sermon-for-palm-sunday-with-the-revd-dave-chesney

What do you hope for?

Where do you find hope?

I recently had the privilege to be part of a team who were invited to be part of the Lenten address week at an independent school in North Essex. The theme of the week, you guessed it, HOPE. Together, with students aged from 11 – 18, we grappled with some of the big questions of life and of faith. Hope in pain and suffering, hope where there seems no hope; hope in everyday life and hope for the future. It was so rewarding to spend time together, to explore thoughts, feelings and emotions, to pray with and for people of many faiths and none – and of course to share with them, the hope that is held out for all of us in Christ Jesus.

Time and again throughout the week, we were reminded of the brokenness of this world, and that if God is loving and benevolent – why is the world in such a mess? Why is there disease, natural disasters, war and conflict, the very rich and the abject poor. Also, I wrote these words at a time when welfare reform in this country is soon to push thousands more people into poverty. One could ask 'where is hope for them?'

This Sunday, Palm Sunday, marks the first day of Holy Week. Jesus' disciples brought a young colt to him and Jesus rode it into Jerusalem. While entering, Matthew 21 says that a very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted 'Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest heaven.'

When Jesus entered Jerusalem the whole city was stirred and asked who is this? On this Palm Sunday I invite you to place yourself into the story. You stand anxiously along the path as you wait for him to come closer. The

sound of the palm branches lowering grows louder with every step; the collective shouts of hosanna are deafening, the energy is exhilarating. It is Jesus, the man you've heard so much about but is still such a mystery. It comes time for him to pass by and it all kind of feels like a blur, as you lay down the palm leaves.

The expectation of what he will do soon rises, you celebrate shouting hosanna to the son of David as he moves towards the city of David – Hosanna in the highest as your expectations heighten.

If you lived in that time, you expected a violent rival in the coming days, you expected for him to take his rightful place of power, you expected and you HOPED for liberation from your circumstances and freedom from your oppression in the way that the kings of this world exact their power.

But as the week goes on, it looks less and less like you expected. It began with glorious shouts but ended with just a gut-wrenching grief. Your hope was rooted in a very human understanding of what liberation and salvation looked like. But as Hebrews 6:19 states 'We have this hope as an anchor for the soul'. If we limit our understanding of hope of something from within our own limited mindset, we're bound to break.

This is the tension of Palm Sunday, to trust our own heart, to lean into our own understating (as it says in Proverbs 3:5). To celebrate our own temporary expectations, our fleeting feelings, more than our everlasting King – this is the tension of Holy Week. To place our man-made solutions on a God-sized problem. And the tension, it really lives in us all. Palm Sunday is so much more than laying down branches, it's about laying down expectations.

To lay down our Palm Sunday expectations on this Good Friday world, and experience once again the hope of a resurrected Jesus and maybe today that's the best thing we could do altogether as we welcome Holy Week to trust Jesus completely with whatever we're facing, outside of our feelings or our understandings – to trust completely that he's moving more than our expectations might tell us and even to lay down those expectations believing that he is working all things out for good and His glory.

So, this week, where we celebrate the one who set apart his life for us, let's not miss this – we've been called to a set apart life – to focus on that during Holy Week. We've been called to a life that is bigger than our own

expectations, plans or hopes and dreams. And it starts by laying everything down before Jesus and joining those on that first Palm Sunday and saying that Jesus really truly is the one we've always longed for. He has walked among us and he has come to save us.

IN CHRIST ALONE MY HOPE IS FOUND. HE IS THE ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL. Amen.