

April 3<sup>rd</sup> Richard of Chichester

**A message from the Rectory for Holy Week 2020**

**Dear Friends,**

This year Holy Week and Easter will feel very different for many of us.

As **Holy Week begins this Sunday** we would normally be remembering Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as our focus turns towards Good Friday and Easter weekend.

We will not be walking with the donkey this Sunday, nor gathering to listen to **the Passion from the Gospel according to St Matthew** in readings and music.

The children have already been at home for a week or two as the Easter Holiday begins, with the joys and challenges of being together 24/7 under the same roof already becoming very apparent.

If you find yourself missing your **Palm Cross** do look at [www.oxford.anglican.org/coronavirus-covid-19/livestream/palm-sunday/](http://www.oxford.anglican.org/coronavirus-covid-19/livestream/palm-sunday/) for creative ways to make crosses and share them with others this Sunday as you think about the enormity of what happened to Jesus on Good Friday.

There are some wonderful recordings of the Bach St Matthew Passion to find and share.

In your Bible this Sunday you can find the **Liturgy of the Palms - Matthew 21:1-11**

and the **Liturgy of the Passion Matthew 26 and 27**

I hope you have enjoyed joining the 'front room worship' with our Archbishops, or our Diocesan Bishops, on Sunday Morning.

**Bishop Stephen Cottrell on last Sunday's BBC Songs of Praise** gave a beautiful picture of the woman touching Jesus' hem to help us to continue to reach out to be with Jesus in these difficult, and for some, dangerous times when we cannot worship with others as we would usually.

It was lovely to see, and hear, the response from people on their **doorsteps on Thursday evening** in gratitude to those who are working on the frontline in our Health services. I wonder have you joined in?

Next Thursday will be **Maundy Thursday** - when we remember the commandment to love, and serve, each other. The response to the 'Good Neighbour' scheme in Pangbourne has been wonderful to see. I know many people have reason to be very thankful to and for your friends and neighbours at the moment.

**Do continue to call the scheme if you need help fetching prescriptions and groceries, including those of you in the wider parish too please.**

The Psalm for Palm Sunday is one of thanksgiving - **Psalm 118**. I urge you to find it, not simply to read as ancient poetry, but to pray it. As you do your prayers will join many millions of other prayers thanking God for salvation and His love that endures forever. It is a spiritual gift of our faith that offering Thanksgiving and Praise leads to Hope and Peace of mind.

Alongside this, this Sunday we are also to read [Psalm 31:9-16](#) as we prepare to face the distress and horror of Jesus on the cross of **Good Friday**.

The words of the suffering servant lead us to pray for all people finding life and loss unbearable today. We are invited in scripture to have 'the mind of Christ'. Our Common Vision is *to become more Christlike*. As we [read the story of the Passion](#) again this week let's ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to offer ourselves through faith to be obedient to God, and to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. *Philippians 2:5-11*

There are good resources on the websites for prayers and activities through Holy Week, suitable for all ages. When we get to Thursday why not [have your own Passover Supper](#) at home?

A lamb dinner with herbs, unleavened bread and red wine can help retell the story from Exodus 12.

We can read the instruction to [commemorate GOD'S SALVATION PLAN](#) for the people of Israel for generations to come. As Christians we also remember Jesus celebrating the Passover with his friends just hours before his death bringing [God's salvation to all people](#).

Children rather ghoulishly love to learn about the plagues of Egypt. Here is the opportunity to engage those who spend time on scary computer games with biblical history. Reading about Moses Aaron and Pharaoh and the battle to rescue the Israelites give great openings for conversations about plagues, and even viruses! *Prince of Egypt (1998)* tells the story well in animation. It can lead to some interesting discussions about natural catastrophes. Perhaps you can link your conversations to the [#Live Lent Care for Creation challenge](#) too?

Don't forget to share the vital Christian message that our God is the God of Love and forgiveness whose plan is for the salvation of all humankind and the whole world and, even though the journey may be tough, it is to the Promised Land in the presence of God himself and so that the people are free to worship God.

[Easter is not far away now](#). Easter brings the promise of new life and fresh beginnings. We are all looking forward to the end of this present COVID-19 crisis. We're told things may get worse before they get better, but we are well prepared.

[We can pray](#). We can worship freely in our own homes.

[We can remember](#) Jesus and our salvation as God's people. [We can give thanks](#).

[We can plan](#) for the joy we will experience when we worship together again:

when [we will tell each other the story of salvation again](#) in person

and [lift our voices to join together in praise of God](#).

Like many of you I have begun to think about the fabulous party we shall have when we put this crisis behind us and forget all about social distancing, and I have already begun to think about the wonderful service we shall have when we are allowed to come together in church to give Thanks and Praise. Whichever month that is we shall still be the **Easter** people.

But for now....

[Keep safe, keep praying](#), and [enjoy knowing that God is with you](#) in your home and your Christian brother and sisters are still loving you, but from a distance that protects both you and them!

with love, Reverend Heather