

Sermon: Rob Young

This Sunday is Palm Sunday. In Silchester we would normally be meeting at the village hall to walk through the common and along the Drove to the Church led by a donkey accompanied by children acting out the passion story dramas on the way. In the past I understand we have been accompanied by Roman Soldiers and ended up in the Roman Amphitheatre. I gather a previous Archbishop of Canterbury,

George Carey led hundreds of people on the walk at the millennium.

This year we were preparing ourselves to cancel or divert the walk because of flooding, though that has now dried up we have had to cancel along with all other village events over the coming weeks because of the lock down.

Silchester is a place where organisations, events and activities, along with the school, churches and pub, are what help to weld the village together and maintain such a strong community spirit, and I suspect many feel as bereft as me with nothing to go to and no opportunity to meet, though thank God for internet and telephone contacts. So I have started asking myself how are we all coping? Different personalities cope in different ways. An extreme introvert I was talking to the other day said: "It was great so far" but there must be others especially some parents who are tearing their hair out - not a problem I have. We all have different personalities and I think it helps us to cope and helps us to support each other if we recognise that, and I would like to explore that today in the context of how we each face lock down today and the Palm Sunday readings.

I expect most of us have come across those questionnaires in magazines which help us to "find ourselves" or our ideal partner, or been faced at an interview with one of those personality tests much beloved by personnel (sorry human resource) departments.

You will also find them in church life, and some years ago I came across one called the 'enneagram'. It does help you to know yourself better and you arrive at a type and number which enneagram addicts love talking about and bore everyone else to tears with, but unlike some of the other personality tests it doesn't necessarily require you to fill in a questionnaire, though some do, and in my experience works best through conversation

and discussion about how we approach things and our attitude to life. It's more about discovering emotions and motivation than definition. It highlights what to avoid as much as what to accept and enjoy. So for instance, a number 2 just wants to care for others, which is great, but every number has a down side and in the case of a number 2 that caring can become suffocating, whilst self sacrifice can become self indulgent. Whilst a number 9 is laid back "*why are you getting so het up about that - chill*", which is also fine but can be incredibly annoying and unhelpful to others. I'm a number 7 which amongst other things means that I spend much of my waking life planning for and living in the possibilities of the future and consequently sometimes, and sadly, miss out on the "now". For instance I really enjoy working on a project and enabling others, but once completed I rarely celebrate because I want to get on to the next thing!

So why am I telling you all this? It is because it is very important that we acknowledge and accept that each of us reacts differently when placed under the stress all of us are experiencing in this present crisis. There is no right or wrong way to handle self isolation except that "we must do it", but it will have different mental and physical health effects on us depending on our personality and the circumstances at home and work, or lack of work, and underlying health or age. So let's be generous to one another, be kind, and give permission for others to respond differently to ourselves.

I think the two Bible readings we have today, amongst other important things, can shed some light on this.

At Palm Sunday, in the church's calendar we move rapidly towards the culmination of Jesus ministry, towards Holy week, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. Throughout this period we will hear about the different ways the people close to Jesus reacted, the impetuous yet fearful Simon Peter (John18:10,15-18), the questioning of Philip (John14:8), the self resignation of Thomas, "Come let us go to Jerusalem that we may

die with him”.(John 11:16). I sometimes wonder how all these different personalities co-existed with one another, but then as I pause and think about it, I am encouraged by that, by that underlying generosity of spirit which must have existed between them, all unified in their faith in Jesus, whom, let’s face it half the time they never really understood!

But there were occasions when they all pulled together, as in our reading today from Matthew.

In the NIV Bible the heading to this passage is “Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King”.

It starts with Jesus sending two of the disciples to the village to find a donkey with its colt. To the Jewish readers this would ring a bell. Matthew is doing what he so often does, evidencing Jesus’ action with Hebrew scripture and on this occasion he hammers it home by quoting the extract from Zechariah 9.9 “Rejoice greatly Daughter Zion! shout Daughter Jerusalem! See your king comes to you, righteous and victorious (Matthew says gentle), lowly and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey”.

The disciples return with the colt and donkey and place their own cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.

Then as Jesus and the disciples descend down the Mount of Olives a large crowd forms which spread their cloaks on the road and cut branches from the trees carpeting the road. And the crowds, borrowing from our other reading Psalm 118, shout “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” and “Hosanna” (which means “save” and later “praise”) and we learn this led to the whole city asking “Who is this”. Our answer to that question and how with our different personalities we respond to that may be what can best hold us together as it did to the disciples in this difficult times.

In my previous churches and indeed in Silchester the emphasis on Palm Sunday has always tended to be on the celebratory part of Palm Sunday; let’s join in with the praise party, Hosanna!, wave

our palm crosses, welcome Jesus into our churches and homes; tuck the palm cross behind the fridge magnet till next year, or pin it above the door. Now all of that is great and I wouldn't want to change it, but what does it mean if we don't have the answer to "Who is this?". After all we might do the same for a famous footballer, pinning our rosettes and team colours on the notice board. I remember xx years ago standing in a crowd at the top of my road in Southampton deliriously shouting and waving my hands as the open top bus went by with the FA cup.

"Who is this?".

To help us explore this I will follow Matthew's example and draw our attention to the other reading appointed for today Psalm 118.

The psalmist's starting point is that God is good "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever". We may not understand God, we may question him, we may argue with him, we may often ask "why", but all those issues pale into insignificance if we doubt his essential goodness and the fact that, notwithstanding the mess we may make of the world or our lives, "His love endures forever". And it is because of that he acts by entering this world in Jesus.

The psalm goes on to say it is better to take refuge in the Lord than in humans. The psalmist cries out to the Lord because he knows he can rely on God's goodness and enduring love..

That doesn't mean he hasn't experienced hardships in life. He recalls how his enemies nearly overwhelmed him but he hung on to the belief that "The Lord is my strength and my defence" and will be my salvation, because of his goodness and enduring love.

He comes to the conclusion that "The Lord has chastened him severely but he has not given him up to death". There were lessons to be learned from the experience, an experience inflicted by others, not by God, but which he survived through trusting in God's essential goodness and enduring love.

This psalm sets out the personality of God more clearly than any enneagram number and then the psalm moves on to say what God is going to do.

He is going to rebuild the foundations of the human world. He is going to create a stone, a saviour, a messiah which although at first rejected by the world for challenging all that is wrong in the world, will become the very cornerstone of the world, and the world will be encouraged to join in welcoming him “with boughs in hand as they join the festal procession”, crying “Lord save us!”

So this is who Jesus is. This is the answer to that question, “Who is this?”. He is the Messiah, the saviour, God incarnate. That’s who Jesus is. The God who is good and whose love endures forever.

So how might this help us all with our various personalities at this very difficult time?

First as we think on Jesus’ crucifixion, as we think on the suffering of the psalmist it is clear that, whether we understand it or not, suffering is part of life. Jesus had to die before resurrection; it was through Jesus’ suffering that we are redeemed. We don’t always have to suffer to find good, but for the psalmist and for us it was out of Jesus suffering that came the greater good, and I for one pray that out of our present suffering will come the greater good and we don’t just slip back into the old ways. Those with a more thoughtful personality may see this. Those who want everything now, need to accept that isn’t always possible, and those whose nature is to be like Thomas may need help to rescue themselves from despair by recalling the hope that is Jesus.

Second Jesus joins with us, whether it is in celebration with palm leaves and partying, or in our suffering. He has experienced all this in his life. He knows what it’s like and he is walking beside us in this, sometimes carrying us, sometimes picking up the pieces, sometimes leading, if we but seek him and listen to him. Those with an imaginative and creative personality will grab at

this, others may find it hard to accept they just need to step out in faith.

Third Jesus is good, his love endures forever, so no matter what the world may throw at us he is wanting the best. I don't know how this pandemic came about. I don't know if any one was at fault, but I do know Jesus is walking with us to help us through it, because he is good and his love endures forever. This is a message for all personalities. It underpins creation, the present and the future. It helps us cope with fear, and if we let it will sweep aside doubt and worry.

We are all struggling in different ways, and though how well we manage may depend on the support we have and our relationships, it will also depend on our personality, how well we know ourselves, and how far we allow Jesus and the knowledge of his goodness and enduring love into our lives.

So I suggest we need to make allowances for ourselves, to forgive ourselves, to not try and force ourselves to be someone we are not, make allowances for others, take down our personality barrier and welcome Jesus just as the crowds did on Palm Sunday, and maybe, whilst we can't physically walk it, in our imagination walk the route with the donkey and our friends through the to the church sometime this Holy Week.

Amen.

Prayers:

Let us pray to the Lord,
who is our refuge and stronghold.
For the health and well-being of our nation,
that all who are fearful and anxious
may be at peace and free from worry: Lord,
hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For the isolated and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs, and
care for them in their vulnerability: Lord,
hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For our homes and families, our
schools and young people,
and all in any kind of need or distress:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.
Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

(Church of England liturgy and prayer resources)

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Blessing

Blessed is the One
who comes to us
by the way of love
poured out with abandon.

Blessed is the One who
walks towards us by the
way of grace that holds
us fast.

Blessed is the One
who calls us to follow
in the way of blessing
in the path of joy.

(by Jan Richardson)

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be
among you, and those you love and miss,
now and always.
Amen

Other opportunities to connect with worshipping communities.

If you would still like to join with the daily Stations of the Cross via a group on Facebook, called **Tadley Pamber and Silchester Benefice** please do so as we take the final steps through Holy Week. Each day there will be a meditation and art I have posted there around the stations of the cross. Please find the page and ask to be accepted into the closed group because of copyright restrictions.

8.10am Sunday Worship BBC Radio 4

10.45 Sunday Worship from Hereford Cathedral, BBC 1.

Daily Reflections from Winchester Cathedral

<https://www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk>

Communion Service by the Bishop of Winchester from Wolversey Chapel each Sunday morning <https://www.winchester.anglican.org>

St Paul's Cathedral

I recommend this series of specially-commissioned short reflections from leading Christian writers. They will include **Lucy Winkett** during Holy Week, **Paula Gooder** on resurrection encounters, and later **Pádraig Ó Tuama** on poetry, **Gillian Straine** on healing and **John Swinton** on vulnerability. We really hope they'll offer insight and comfort in these extraordinary times.

<https://mailchi.mp/77558deef2ab/coming-up-from-st-pauls-cathedral-1264315?e=92212f17f8>

Fresh Opportunities to help

The new Hampshire County Council Hub to support the community through the crisis has now been established. If you are able to offer support and would like to be involved, please contact them on 0333 370 4000. Your call will then be triaged and you will be passed to whichever organisation or local contact would be most appropriate.