



HOPPERS CROSSING UNITING CHURCH

*Loving God, neighbour and self
with heart, mind, soul and strength.*

**Sunday Worship at Home
5th April 2020**

Palm Sunday

'What Motivates You?'



We Gather

A candle may be lit to symbolise Christ's presence

CALL TO WORSHIP

The grace of the Lord Jesus
Christ the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Our hearts rejoice in the blessed one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever.

PSALM 118:24, 26, 29

PSALM 118:1-2, 19-29 *O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good*

¹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

²Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

²³This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you with heart and life and voice, not only with outward signs such as palm branches or the occasional "Hosanna", but with lives truly turned towards you. It seems such a distance from this present day Palm Sunday in Australia to that day when you entered Jerusalem with the shouts of the crowd ringing in your ears. Welcomed as a king, yet riding on a lowly donkey. Greeted with cheers and acclamations which were so soon to turn to jeers and condemnation. From this side of the resurrection, we confidently believe that we could never have been part of the jeering crowd – but would we, if we had been there?
Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, Lord of the Church,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word and deed:
we have not loved you with all our heart
or served you with all our strength;
we have been blind to the vision of a renewed world
and deaf to your call to costly discipleship;
we have been indifferent to the suffering of others
and unwilling to forgive one another.
In your mercy, Lord, pardon and restore us,
that together in the ministry of Christ
we may serve you with joy all the days of our life. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news: "Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

PHILIPPIANS 2:6, 7a, 8b

Through his obedience, we are therefore freed from whatever sin enslaves us.
Thanks be to God!

PASSING OF THE PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you and also with you.

WE LISTEN

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to my feet a light to our path

ISAIAH 50:4-9 *It is the Lord God who helps me*

⁴The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens— awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ⁹It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus*
⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

MATTHEW 21:1-11 *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord*
¹When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." ⁴This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵"Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Lord, may your word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory.

A REFLECTION

The text for this reflection is taken from Matthew 21:10. "*When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?'*" And the title of this reflection is, 'What motivates you?'

In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

When I was in primary school, and that was many years ago, every morning the start of the school day began with the senior classes lining up in military fashion out the front of the main school building and standing before the flagpole which flew the national flag.

We children were expected to be still and quiet as we stood at attention and recited the pledge, the words I cannot remember, and then sing the national anthem 'God Defend New Zealand'. No one explained to me the reason of why it was done, I just thought, in my nine-year-old mind, it was done to instil in

each of us children a motivation for school as well as national pride. Not that I understood what any of these concepts meant. Looking back I reckon that having been diligent and paying my taxes, having stayed out of trouble, I think I did, and having strived to be a good model citizen, I think I've done okay. I think I've done okay in living out the words of the pledge, whatever they were, as well as the words of the national anthem that we sang. And so maybe the ritual that was played out every school day morning was a good motivational tool and a guide for living out my life. I trust that it was the same experience for my friends and associates at school.

Friends, today, I want to explore the question 'What motivates you?' What motivates you? A good place to start as with delve into the text from Matthew's gospel is to again consider the role of the crowd, for you see, it's a rhetorical device used by the author of Matthew's gospel to communicate some important things.

In the New Revised Standard Version Bible, the gospel text that is set down for today is subtitled, "*Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem*". It heralds what the church customarily associates with Palm Sunday; a reminder that Jesus will soon die. In a matter of days, he will be subject to a kangaroo court. He'll be tried and judged and executed on a cross. There are several things to note about the crowd. First, in verses 6-8, we read, and I quote, "*⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.*" "*⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches and spread them on the road.*"

Now the act of spreading their cloaks on the road is an interesting one. Particularly when you consider the poverty of the time, it may have seen or appeared to be a very silly thing to do. And while the text doesn't say it, but it does in John 12:13, we associate palm branches among the other things used by the crowd to celebrate and show their devotion to Jesus. The palm tree incidentally was a symbol of Israel, as we find in Isaiah 9:14, as well as Joel 1:12. That's the first thing.

The second thing about the crowd is found further at verse 9, and I quote, "*⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven'*" end of quote.

The crowd cries Hosanna. Now this word 'Hosanna' literally translates as 'save us'. 'Save us' is the crowd's statement of faith or the confession of faith in Jesus, who will come to save them. But I wonder if the crowd's idea of a saviour is one who would come in power, that is in military power and might to save them from their Roman occupiers. This idea would be in stark contrast to how Jesus understood himself and his role. Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians church signals this and I quote verses 5-8. "*⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality*

with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” That’s the second thing.

The third thing the crowd does is found at verse 10, and I quote, “¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ ¹¹The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’” Now this word ‘turmoil’, is translated from a strong Greek word to describe the effects of an earthquake. That’s right, an earthquake. It enlarges, therefore, the impact that Jesus’ arrival makes, that is, it is an earth-shattering one. That’s right, earth-shattering. Now that’s enough to get anyone’s attention, don’t you think? The text, with its unfolding story of Jesus’ arrival into Jerusalem, reveals the crowd’s motivation for their devotion and allegiance to him. They are thinking that he has come to change everything and rightly so. Yes, Jesus’ arrival will change everything but not in the way the crowd thought.

Consider Philippians 2:5-8 that we just read earlier. And in case you think the crowd’s devotion and allegiance is a glowing endorsement of Jesus that is going to be ongoing, well think again, because it’s not going to last very long. You see for later on in Matthew’s gospel and leading up to Jesus’ execution; we will read of the crowd’s request to free Barabbas over Jesus, 27:15-21, and its willingness to have Jesus crucified, verses 22-23. The fluctuation of the crowd between devotion and desertion reminds me a bit of Melbourne weather, you know, it’s so up and then down, one minute it’s sunny and warm and the next it’s pouring rain and cold. One minute, the crowd’s reception of Jesus is sunny and warm, and next minute, it’s pouring rain, it’s pouring rain and cold when they asked for Jesus to be crucified. It would seem that the motivation for their short-lived devotion to Jesus is just that, it’s superficial, they were seeing Jesus in human terms, that is for what he could do for them in the short term. As opposed to the divine accord, whereby the ushering in of the reign of God was Jesus’ priority, his priority, the reign of God would be characterised by true freedom, liberation, justice, mercy, compassion and more. And these were to flourish and be experienced by all. Obviously, this was going to be a very long-term vision project.

In case we are quick to pass judgment of the crowd in Matthew’s gospel, we must ask ourselves an important question. ‘What about ourselves?’ What about you, what about me, what about us? Is it possible we have something in common with the crowd?

Each time we gather, friends, as we have done many Sundays past and as we gather today, we will declare our devotion and allegiance to Jesus through the liturgy through such things as singing of the songs, responding to the scriptures after we have heard them read, and saying the creeds, as well as saying the commitment “we go in peace to love and to serve the Lord, in the name of Christ, Amen” that we say at the end. Well, you know what friends, it’s not enough to honour and pledge allegiance to Jesus one day, and then fail to do

so on the other six days of the week. Jesus is not a good luck charm that we hold close to one day, and then we discard the next day when he fails, when Jesus fails to deliver when things go bad. We cannot be up and down like Melbourne weather Christians. A quote I often hear helps remind me of this: "Jesus is Lord of all or not at all." Jesus is Lord of all or not at all. The Lordship of Jesus over our lives will continue to be tested even right now in the midst of the Corona COVID-19 pandemic.

The Reverend Dr Sam Wells, a Church of England priest recently wrote an article to his congregation titled 'something more infectious', and I quote his words, *"We come to church each Sunday, we pray and read our Bibles through the week, to prepare ourselves. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, travelled around Galilee to prepare himself for Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, people discovered who he truly was, and what his words and actions really entailed. We've spent decades, many of us, preparing we knew not what for, well, now we know...This is the moment when the world finds out whether being a Christian makes any difference or not."* End of quote.

"It is the Lord God who helps me", says Isaiah. Isaiah 50:9, one of the readings for today. *"It is the Lord God who helps me."* Friends may you be encouraged by these words from Isaiah as together with Jesus, we journey with Him amidst the current coronavirus and beyond. *"It is the Lord God who helps me."* God will strengthen us. You and me, all of us, despite the fears that each one of us may have. Fears about the present and fears of the future, and fears that we hold for our families and loved ones and our friends, and fears for ourselves and fears for our world. *"It is the Lord God who helps me."* God will strengthen us as we seek to love our neighbour. In our current context, we can show our love for our neighbour, and keep them alive by keeping the virus at bay by following the government directions and regulations regarding social distancing and staying home. These things I know are difficult for us to do because we are social beings, we want to interact with other human beings, but it's difficult to do so in the current climate. And so we are asked, directed, to distance ourselves and to stay at home and only leave if necessary, but we need to stay at home so that other people can be kept alive.

We can show our love friends, albeit from a distance. We can practice that age-old art of writing. Do you remember that? Yes, the age-old art of writing. Writing cards and writing letters to our friends and family and loved ones and keeping connected by using social media, like what we are doing right now. And of course, there is the good old telephone that we can also use to care for others. *"It is the Lord God who helps me,"* says Isaiah.

Sisters and brothers, God will strengthen you and me, and all of us, even when we find our motivation waning and beginning to go cold. And I trust that doesn't happen. Friends, allow God to become the motivation for your life. The motivation for living your life, because you see, doing so will make all the difference. It'll make the difference to you, it'll make all the difference to others, and it will surely make a difference in the world. Amen.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, thank you for the words of Isaiah. "It is the Lord God who helps me", and so, help my sisters and brothers by strengthening each one of them and all of us, and myself as well, to love you and each other, despite the current situation that we are in. Indeed, O God, your presence and your peace enables us to do all of these and more, and for that, we are grateful and thankful. Amen.

We Respond

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Take a moment to pray for one or more of the following:

- countries and nations of the world
- those who are sick and in need
- the Church and our congregation

After each prayer, a response may be said such as:

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

And in the languages of the nation's we pray as Jesus taught...

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,

your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

OFFERING

You are invited to contribute financially to support the ministry and mission of the Hoppers Crossing congregation using the following details:

<u>Bank Transfer</u>	<u>Credit Card</u>
BSB: 013-915	www.HoppersUniting.church/offering
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We are Sent

BENEDICTION

Go into the world in peace,
embraced by the steadfast love of God,
blessed by the humility and courage of Jesus Christ
and filled with the immeasurable power of the Holy Spirit.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with you now and always.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

The service is ended

Acknowledgment

Opening prayer, Assurance, Benediction – Moira Laidlaw

Scripture texts – New Revised Standard Version bible © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.