

## Palm Sunday 2020

Matthew 21 vv 1-11, Isaiah 50 vv 4-11, Psalm 31, Philippians 2 vv 5-11, Matthew 27 vv 1-54 (BCP Gospel)

S Theodulf was Bishop of Orleans under the Emperor Charlemagne. Charlemagne's successor, although known as Louis the Pious, objected to Theodulf's views about icons and had the bishop imprisoned in the year 818. It was while he was in prison that Theodulf wrote the hymn we usually sing on Palm Sunday, *All Glory, Laud and Honour*. I am sure I have been told that Theodulf was inspired to compose by hearing the children singing outside his cell walls, but I cannot find corroboration of that. Legend has it that Louis heard Theodulf singing and let him go, but, sadly, it is more likely that the saint perished in prison.

Anyway, *All Glory Laud and Honour* is a very popular hymn which we enjoy singing on Palm Sunday. The first year I was here, we had a Palm Sunday Procession through Cuxton to St Michael's with a beautiful white donkey and I am sure we sang the Palm Sunday hymn as we processed. A year or two before, holding a procession at Newington (but without a donkey), we picked up some children who joined us for the service in church. Most years at Cuxton nowadays, we sing this hymn in procession up the hill from the church hall to the church. I think of it as my basic fitness test. Can I sing walking uphill wearing heavy robes? At Halling, we normally process round the inside of the church, waving our palm crosses and singing this hymn. Some people think it is a bit long. Perhaps it is, but originally it had 39 verses, most of which have been cut in our hymnbooks.

Palm Sunday crowds – the crowd who accompanied Jesus on the road to Jerusalem and sang *Hosanna*, the folk in whose company we sing *All Glory, Laud & Honour* each year on Palm Sunday. The crowds we might meet in everyday life – at the shops or the garden centre, or, if we're so inclined, at the football match or concert. Family, friends, the groups of people we look forward to visiting us in our homes or with whom we go out to enjoy ourselves. All on hold because of this wretched virus. We may feel more like S Theodulf alone in his cell than one of our Lord's apostles surrounded by other disciples and welcomed with Him by the crowds into the holy city for the great feast of Passover, which attracted literally millions of pilgrims each year to Jerusalem.

*It's so boring*, someone said to me on one of my permitted outings to pick up essential supplies. Even if you are free of the disease and well supplied with all the goods you need for a prolonged siege, being confined at home all the time is so frustrating for so many people. I guess that most of us are in better places than Theodulf locked up in mediaeval cloisters, which were no doubt cold and austere, but it's still confinement against our will – even though it is in a good cause. We must take what steps we can to avoid infection and to avoid the risk of spreading it to other people.

Another well known Palm Sunday hymn has the verse: *Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die: O Christ, your triumphs now begin o'er captive death and conquered sin*. It could say *in lonely pomp ride on to die*. His apostles and disciples did not understand. Neither did those jubilant crowds. The apostles all fled and left Him alone in the Garden of Gethsemane to face the music. It is not unlikely that some of the same people in the crowd who cried *Hosanna* on Palm Sunday were also in the crowd which cried *Crucify* on Good Friday. He was alone in the crowd.

Jesus came to earth to die on the Cross. On the Cross, He shares all our trials and temptations. He shares all the darkness of our lives. He shares our death. He understands from His own experience all our pain, fear and anxiety. He knows what it is to be alone. We can always talk to Him in prayer about all our problems and know that He understands us and that He cares for us. He could not care more for us than to lay down His life for us. Jesus is with us in everything which we experience, good and bad alike. He is our companion on our life's journey. He is our example. He is our guide. It is He Who supports and sustains us. v6 of today's psalm is *Into thy hands I commend my spirit: for thou hast redeemed, O Lord, thou God of truth.* Jesus said these words just before He died on the Cross. I say them every night in bed when I switch off the light. Christians can say these words at any time in any circumstances confident that God hears our prayer and does look after us.

On the Cross, Christ overcomes all the power of evil. Our sins are forgiven through faith in Him. Death is defeated. Satan is overcome. There really is, at the deepest level, nothing for us to fear.

Theodulf was in prison with every reason to be lonely, uncomfortable and afraid. Yet he found the grace to sing this wonderful hymn of praise to God, maybe because he had heard others singing outside his cell walls, just as we are experiencing beauty and love when we look out of our windows and over our fences at the world beyond and share messages of hope with other people by phone or letter or internet or in our experience, as we pray, of knowing that other people are praying too in Christian fellowship throughout the world. Christ was with Theodulf in his cell. He is with us today in our homes and in our hearts.

Jesus spoke of a time and of times when the world would seem to be a very threatening place. He taught us not to be afraid or to despair. On the contrary, Jesus told us to look up and to be ready to receive all the good things which God has promised us.

Luke 21: <sup>25</sup> And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; <sup>26</sup> Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. <sup>27</sup> And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

Romans 8: <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. <sup>37</sup> Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.