

Dear friends,

My first main Sunday service of 2025 was at St. Peter's, and it was quite an emotional affair, but the liturgy is ingrained so that everything went perfectly. It was lovely to see so many people plug myself back in to life back in England.

I had a little "do" last Thursday when I came over all cold and clammy at the dining table. En-route to the sofa to lay down I collapsed and fell against the French windows cutting my face in three places and mangling my glasses, which flew off. One thing I've learned of course, married to a doctor is that you get no sympathy whatsoever! I've only fainted a couple of times in my life, but the trick is to get down on the ground as quickly as possible – I put it down to re-acclimatizing to the British climate. Still, no harm done and onwards and upwards.

There is NO Choral evensong next Sunday at St. Peter's. This is because Stephen Tanner and the choir are joining together with the choir at Sidmouth parish church and their new permanent organist and well known friend David Davies to perform a liturgical performance of Stainer's crucifixion. So the location is at St. Giles and St. Nicholas church Church Street, Sidmouth, EX10 8LG at 6pm.

Looking ahead to Easter Sunday, the organisation of the sunrise service has started. We will gather at around 5.45am but the location is slightly different – the "prayer cairn" rather than in front of the new Rockfish café. Coffee and bacon baps will be sold at Wesley's cafe after the service.

Sunday 13th April – Palm Sunday

I will be presiding at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively and Reverend Robert Charles will preside at St. Peter's at 8am and 10am.

Isaiah 50: 4-9a. Most people have seen this as the third of the "servant songs" (even though "servant" is never mentioned) and it is the most intensely personal. The others could be about "Israel", but this one speaks of his ears, back, cheek, beard and face. A man being reviled and insulted but not flinching from his task. It has been seen as a prophecy of Jesus since early times in the church.

Philippians 2: 5-11. This passage has been thought of as being a quote from an early hymn. It is also the source of a certain kind of theology called "Apophatic" theology, which means "self-emptying". Jesus rather than staying by God's side in glorious peace and comfort chose to be born as a human being and suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, in order to clearly demonstrate the redeeming love of God.

Luke 19: 28-40. The events of Palm Sunday read not as an impromptu event but a clearly planned and thought-out counter demonstration in opposition to the status quo of Roman/Jewish Sanhedrin hegemony and hypocrisy. It was a clear demonstration of the politics of peace against violence and oppression. The values of the kingdom of God and the values of the Kingdoms of this world and their worldly ways.

Thought for the Day

The events of Palm Sunday demonstrate defiance and hope. Defiance, in that it was a deliberate counter demonstration mocking and subverting the entrance into the city of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Hope, in that it heralded the hope of peace and humility that would one day supplant all the coercion, compromise, oppression and fear that ruled the roost is first century Israel. The course of events in the world 2025 years later seem to mock the events of Palm Sunday with endless wars, oppression, injustice and man's inhumanity to man ever since. But building heaven on Earth has always been a thankless and impossible task. Just as last week Jesus said "the poor you will always have with you" so it seems that we will also always have the darker side of civilisation with us as well. We can aim high, but we'll end up missing the target. Interestingly "missing the target" is the word we have used – Hamartia- and translated it as the word "sin". In that you aim for the target, but your arrow always falls short, and you miss. So yes, we can aim for peace, justice, truth, and any other virtue you can think of, but as humans we will ultimately always miss the mark. The values of the kingdom of God are as true and as needed now in the world as they have ever been, but it is just as true that we'll always miss our goal of ever fully achieving it. Christianity is a vehicle for proclaiming those eternal kingdom virtues, and we do make things better by being the "salt and light" of the world but until the end of time we won't achieve them fully until God is all in all – the Parousia.

The Prayer for Today is for Palm Sunday

**We praise you, O God,
for your redemption of the world through your Son, Jesus Christ.
He entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph
and was proclaimed Messiah and king
by those who spread garments and branches along his way.
Just as we carry these branches,
may we follow Christ in the way of the cross that,
dying and rising with him, we may enter into your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.**

Love and Peace,
Martin