

'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.'

'Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.'

'...could you not stay awake with me one hour?'

'Friend, do what you are here to do.'

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.'

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

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

We enter into what I can only describe as a truly heart-breaking week for us all. The most sacred week of the church's year is one for us to be spent alone. How I long for us to be outside processing with Palm Crosses singing *All Glory Laud and Honour* and *Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest*. I pray that you continue to keep yourselves nourished on Christ's words in the Scriptures and attendant to Him in prayer. Without the comfort of our Lord at this time, the world would seem truly too bleak for us to bear.

Today is a day to rejoice in Christ as the Son of David, yet also a day tainted by foreknowledge of what the journey to Jerusalem meant for our Lord. The great scene of the crowd pushing in around Christ as he journeyed into Jerusalem are contrasted with our own isolation and silence at this time. Whilst we are having to shun company, let this Holy Week, be an opportunity for us all to reflect upon the aloneness Christ himself must have felt on his final journey to Jerusalem. The crowd cheering Christ as the Son of David on Palm Sunday were soon to be the crowd baying for his blood. How quickly the people changed their minds.

As we read through the Passion Narrative today we see Christ's aloneness emphasised still further. We read of the great moment of the Last Supper, where Christ revealed a great mystery to his disciples and to us all. Yet in that room, at that great moment, Judas was there, ready to leave and betray Jesus. Christ gave everything of himself, only to be abandoned:

'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.'

At that same meal, on that same night, we see not one but two betrayals. Peter, to whom Christ bestowed the keys of heaven, the man who would go on to lead the early Church, who thought his commitment to Jesus was beyond reproach, 'Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.' And yet:

'Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.'

Judas, leaves, and the disciples, having participated in the Last Supper head with Christ to pray in Gethsemane. The disciples must have known Jesus was in agony, they must have known he was preparing himself for his death. They have all pledged their allegiance to him, Peter especially so, 'I will never desert you' he said and yet they fall asleep. Such was Christ's isolation and aloneness that the ones he trusted most could not even wait with him for an hour:

'...could you not stay awake with me one hour?'

Jesus has to wake up his disciples as Judas returns with the soldiers. Judas, who had followed Christ everywhere, who Jesus would have cared for and tried to show him the way, betrays Christ for thirty pieces of silver, roughly £200 in today's money. And yet, Christ still calls Judas his friend:

'Friend, do what you are here to do.'

Not only is Christ betrayed by Judas, but he is abandoned entirely by his disciples, who after the scene in Gethsemane all flee from the scene. Christ is truly alone at this point, having been abandoned by those whom he loved the most.

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

When Christ is before the crowd, the very crowd who proclaimed him to be the Son of David, who were putting their cloaks down in the road for him to walk across on his donkey, who were waiving palm branches in the air turned against him entirely:

'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.'

Christ is abandoned first by Judas, then by the other disciples, denied by Peter, rejected by the crowd and so is left to face Golgotha alone. On the cross, Christ bore the sins of all humanity, of a humanity that had rejected him to the last. Christ's abandonment and isolation was so great that he even felt as if God the Father had abandoned him.

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

As we sit in isolation this week, meditate upon the words from Scripture showing Christ's journey from the joy of Palm Sunday to his complete isolation and betrayal by Good Friday. Whilst we may suffer feelings of being alone and isolated, remember that Christ was there first, and suffered worse at the hands of those he came to help and serve. At this most difficult time for us hold Christ close to your heart. The tragedy of betrayal and isolation on Good Friday was transformed into joy on Easter Day as Christ overturned death and rose to new life. I hope and pray that through this journey in isolation we may look forward to the day when our Churches may open again we will be able to sing the Lord's praises together again in unity and Godly love.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit