

## Henley-in-Arden Baptist Church

### “Staying Connected” 3 – Sunday 5th April 2020

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*Staying connected to God and each other while not meeting as church in the normal way.*

(Incidentally I hope you all remembered to put your clocks forward last week. I didn't notice anyone late for church!)

“...See your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey...” Matthew 21:5
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Today is Palm Sunday, where we remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem [Matthew 21:1-11], and the symbolism of triumphant kingship yet humility and peace. Jesus was aware that he was riding to his impending death. Crowds shouting ‘Hosanna’ just didn't get it. He still had control at this point, but in love he was handing over control, sacrificing his life for us and for the world.

Things may seem out of control for us at present; but individually and together we affirm again our faith in the one who is in ultimate control.

Where logistically possible I have distributed some Palm crosses. If you have a Palm cross, you might like to consider displaying it in a window as a sign that this Easter time, the church is alive and well. Jesus died and is alive! But more of that next week. (Next week I hope to distribute “Staying Connected” a little earlier, and there will be meditations for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday).

In this strange and unsettling environment which seems like a war really, against this virus; we have a tremendous and certain hope and confidence in the God who gives life in all its fulness. That's a promise we have in Christ. Lots of difficulty and unresolved questions perhaps; lots of anxiety for many of us, certainly; but an assurance that God is with us in it all. How does that work out in practical terms? I think in two ways:

Firstly, Jesus never promised an easy time of it. It's in the midst of the difficulties that we can especially know God's closeness with us. And so we allow His light to shine in the darkness; and as we receive His comfort and help, so we can allow that to reach others too – perhaps by a word of encouragement on the ‘phone: brighten up someone's day; or prayer... or allowing others to encourage us similarly.

Secondly,

Putting all this in perspective, things are certainly different at the present time, but it won't always be like this. Meanwhile, we can take the opportunity to spend time differently, and indeed to develop our relationship with God in different ways.

Can I encourage you to look afresh at the book of Psalms. These scriptures were Jesus' hymnbook really, and there are many instances recorded in the gospels where He either quotes from it or alludes to it. The Psalms are a glorious mix of praise and lament, the real stuff of life. Perhaps when we get together again, we can devote a service to sharing some of our favourites...

The future currently seems uncertain to us in so many ways; but ultimately the glorious future we have is assured. Meanwhile, now and in the future, nothing can separate us from God's love.

Lord God, holy in majesty, we worship You. We thank you for the privilege of bringing our prayers to you. We thank you for the promises you give, which are ‘Yes’ in Jesus [2 Cor 1:20]. May your Holy Spirit be our help, our guide, our comfort. Fill us with your love and peace, we pray

Lord God, King of the universe, whose Son entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey to the praise of the crowds, help **us** to recognise Him as saviour – and to cry out ‘Hosanna in the highest!’ May we allow Him to gently minister to us, a word of peace and encouragement, as at the same time we recognise Him as Lord.

Lord Jesus, you rode, ultimately to your death. We are grateful that you took that path for us and for a needy world. Lord, in our time of need, we throw ourselves onto your mercy and love and care.

We pray for those throughout the world on the front line of this crisis, for health workers, for those in government, for those distributing food and medicine to those in need. We remember those in extreme poverty, those in crowded refugee camps, those in fear... Lord, you came to share and experience the reality of a broken world, and to transform it by your love; mitigate their suffering, and bring your peace, we pray

*we linger for a while in prayer, trusting that God is with us*

*and then, giving thanks, we declare:*

Yours be the kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and forever.  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Amen

A reminder...

Keep blessing each other with ‘phone calls – think who may especially appreciate a call....

Flag up any needs; and keeping praying!

Those online are obviously able to access all sorts of helps, online services and stay connected in various ways.

Worship services on Radio and TV the coming week include:

Radio 4: Sunday Service: ‘Walking in the company of Jesus’.  
8:10am (40 minutes)

Palm Sunday service – BBC1 11:00am (30 minutes) from Hereford Cathedral

And finally, please do get in touch with me at any time

May God bless you with His peace.

Mike

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“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?..... [nothing!]”  
Romans 8:35-39

