

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 24 March 2024 - Palm Sunday

Lectinary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Liturgy of Palms: Mark 11.1-11 or John 12.12-16; Psalm 118.1-2, 19-29. Liturgy of Passion: Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 31.9-16; Philippians 2.5-11; Mark chapter 14.1 to Chapter 15.47 or Mark 15.1-39 (40-47)

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Ruth Holmes - Assistant Curate in Training, Ely Benefice

Over the last eight years, Walt Disney have been re-making some of their most famous animated films in live action. These have been some of the highest grossing films of the last decade. In 2016, they made a striking version of *The Jungle Book* with true-to-life animals created by computer animation. In 2017, Emma Watson (known for her role as Hermione in the Harry Potter films) starred as Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. And in 2019, Will Smith – a well-known African American actor and hip-hop artist from the 90s – took to the screen as the Genie in an adaption of *Aladdin*.

Aladdin is a homeless orphan living on the streets. He meets a disguised princess and falls in love. Then, attempting to visit the princess, he gets captured by Jafar (the “baddie”) and sent on a mission to retrieve a magic lamp. Having completed the mission, Jafar double crosses Aladdin and throws him into a Cave. Aladdin's pet monkey steals back the lamp, Aladdin rubs the lamp, and out comes a genie who offers to grant three wishes. Aladdin's first wish is to become a prince, hoping to impress the princess...and just like that Aladdin finds himself entering the city as Prince Ali.

[For those with a screen available, an option to show video here and cut next paragraph]

As newly created Prince Ali prepares to enter the city, the drums and dramatic music start. People begin to line the streets. Hundreds of flag bearers, dancers, singers, and musicians march in elaborate clothing, singing “make way!”. The genie sings of the prince's many impressive attributes. He tells the people to bow down and genuflect. Prince Ali finally appears, riding an elephant and throwing gold into the crowd. All this is meant to tell the Sultan – the princess's father – that this is someone he should pay attention to. The people looking on are led to believe Prince Ali has great riches and power, just the kind of person who should marry a princess. The way in which this entry takes place communicates something to those who are watching.

Today, as we celebrate Palm Sunday, our gospel reading tells us of a very different entry into the city. Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We might expect this “King of Israel” (as the onlookers in John's gospel call him) to enter like Aladdin's Prince Ali. Surely a

king would enter with splendour and majesty. More than that, Jesus is by now thought by some to be the Messiah, the one promised by God who would free Israel from sin and suffering. There were all sorts of expectations about how the Messiah should enter Jerusalem. Some wanted a military leader, on a horse and chariot, ready to overthrow the Roman empire. Jesus enters in such a way that he does fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament, but not in the way most people expected.

Making the comparison with Aladdin helps us to draw out the significance and strangeness of Jesus' entry. Like Aladdin, Jesus draws people onto the streets. Unlike Aladdin, Jesus does not stir up the crowd and send people ahead to herald his entry. Instead, Jesus attracts attention because by now he is well known as one who teaches and heals. He is liked well enough that when - in Mark's gospel - his disciples untie someone's colt for Jesus to borrow, the owner allows the disciples to go ahead without a quarrel. Jesus has many followers, has built a reputation, and has started to upset the authorities of the day. He does not ask for the crowd, but they turn out to greet him anyway.

How about the entry itself? Aladdin enters on an impressive elephant. Jesus enters on a lowly, borrowed colt. In John's gospel we are told directly that this fulfils a prophecy from Zechariah. There, we are told that one who will be righteous and victorious, who will proclaim peace, and free prisoners, is the one who enters riding on a colt (a foal of a donkey, it clarifies). This is not a display of power, but one of service and humility. The colt says something about the way in which Jesus will overthrow the powers that stand against the Kingdom of God.

The theme continues in the way Jesus is shown honour by those who have lined the streets. Aladdin, and many real-life kings and emperors throughout history, have arranged for themselves extensive entourages of performers, gifts, gold carriages (or, in our day, a series of impressive cars or a red carpet). Jesus, however, is ready to enter Jerusalem simply accompanied by his disciples. Those disciples were for the most part unimpressive. They were fishermen, zealots, women, tax collectors. Not people who would attract much honour in those days. Even so, the people lining the streets respond to Jesus by finding ways to show honour. Mark's gospel tells us that some take off their coats and lay them on the street before Jesus. Others take branches cut from the fields, surely meant for another purpose, and put those alongside the coats. These things were not asked for and certainly not paid for by Jesus but were given in recognition that he was someone significant.

Even more, the people do not stop with laying down cloaks and branches. Their excitement overflows as they shout out to Jesus. Mark and John each record a variety of phrases: "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the Highest Heaven!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!". Each of these says something about who they understood Jesus to be. Hosanna means "save us", it acknowledges all that Jesus could do. To align Jesus with David and call him king of Israel was to recognise that this is the promised ancestor of David who would make things right. The crowd are full of expectancy and excitement for all that Jesus will accomplish as he brings about the Kingdom of God.

So, what does this triumphal entry tell us about Jesus? The crowds get some things right. Jesus is king, he is the one who will bring salvation, he deserves honour and praise. Yet later

in the week these same crowds call for Jesus' crucifixion. What changed? Well, perhaps these crowds in all their excitement missed the lowliness of the colt. Perhaps they missed the strange group of disciples. They miss, perhaps, that this is not the entry of a military leader, but of a suffering servant.

We might wonder if, in part, Jesus was preparing the people for the events we will mark in Holy Week. Drawing their attention to the way of suffering he will walk over the coming days. As Lent draws to a close, we too turn our faces towards Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. We will allow ourselves to be drawn into these profound days, as we get ready to fully embrace the hope of Easter Sunday. Let us sing praises and wave our palm branches today, proclaiming again that this Jesus is King! And let us stay engaged in the week ahead, walking the way of suffering with Christ, that we might celebrate all the more when Easter finally arrives.

[If technology is available, another way to preach this sermon would be to watch the clip from Aladdin at link below and print out both gospel readings. Ask people to play "spot the difference" between this and the passages from Mark and John. Then take feedback and start the sermon with "The comparison with Aladdin helps us to draw out the significance and strangeness of Jesus' entry". Aladdin video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGLSPyGszjo>]

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

In these prayers we are going to focus on the world, the church, our own community, and those known to us. In each section I will name particular concerns, after each section I will

leave some silence. Please do add to these prayers in your own hearts with whatever comes to mind.

So, let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank you for the world you have created. We are sorry for the ways in which we do not look after the world around us. Today we pray especially for places feeling most acutely the effects of climate change. We pray too for around the world who are dealing with conflict, with poverty, and with other kinds of need.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We turn now to pray for the church. We pray for all who lead and especially for Bishop Dagmar in this time of vacancy. We thank you Lord for all who serve our churches in many and varied ways. We pray that you would continue to equip us, Lord, as we seek to live out our call as your disciples. On this Palm Sunday, we pray you would draw all of us more deeply into faith as we mark the events of your passion in the week ahead.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray, too, for our own community. Lord God, give wisdom and strength to those who lead us nationally and locally. We pray for our schools, hospitals, prisons, community centres and workplaces. We pray too for this church as part of our community, that you would use us to bring your light to this community. Help us to be those who are bold to proclaim that you are the King of Kings, the one who saves us.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our pray.**

Finally, in a moment of silence we pray for those we know. We think particularly of those who are sick in any way, we pray for those who are dying, and for those who are bereaved. *[silence for the congregation to remember situations they know]*. God of compassion we pray that you would bring your comfort and help to each of these situations in our lives and in the lives of our neighbours, friends, and family members.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Suggested hymns/songs

Ride on, ride on in majesty
All Glory, Laud and Honour, to you, Redeemer King
Christ is our cornerstone
When I survey the wondrous cross
Blessed be the name of the Lord (the name of the Lord is a strong tower)
Make way, make way for the King of Kings
Blessed be your name (in the land that is plentiful)

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)