



Call to Worship

The cry of injustice calls us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross,
as we prepare to celebrate Christ's rising from death.

Create in us a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within us.

Jesus sought out the rejected; teach us to stand alongside the marginalised.

Together, we seek to follow your path to justice, rising to the call and demands of discipleship.

Hymn: StF 264 Make way for Christ the King (*Graham Kendrick*)

<https://youtu.be/3s32mX6zvHg>

Make way, make way, for Christ the King
in splendour arrives;
fling wide the gates and welcome him
into your lives.

*Make way (Make way), make way (make way),
for the King of Kings (for the King of Kings)
make way (make way), make way (make way),
and let his Kingdom in.*

He comes the broken hearts to heal,
the prisoners to free;
the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,

the blind shall see.

Chorus...

And those who mourn with heavy hearts,
who weep and sigh,
With laughter, joy and royal crown
he'll beautify.

Chorus...

We call you now to worship him
as Lord of all,
to have no gods before him,
their thrones must fall!

Chorus...

Opening Prayer

Holy Lord, in this Holiest of Weeks, we look to the strength of Jesus who continued holding out hope for your people, knowing how challenging and painful that was to prove. As we approach the low of Good Friday, we are privileged to know that the High of Easter Day is coming. Grant us the strength and trust in your love, that we may maintain our commitment to justice, wherever that takes us. Amen.

Scripture Luke 19:28-46 – *Jesus makes his position clear*

Sermon *Rising to the Call: How far are you prepared to go?*

In our Lenten journey, as have followed Jesus as he has gone from his baptism by John and we now approach the final week as he resolutely and obediently sets out to Jerusalem. We have seen the stabilising thread of Jesus' very special connection with God – always seeking and reconnecting with God in prayer. At his baptism he received assurance of God's support and confirmation of his purpose. He rebuffed temptation throughout his ministry, always referring to God as revealed in scripture. Everything he has done has been held in very personal prayer. At the transfiguration, God once again confirmed to Jesus that he was on the right path and that he was held firmly in God's love. As well as giving Jesus that assurance, God spoke directly to the disciples – yes, he is my son, yes, I love him, and you must listen to the truths he is sharing with you. This was a direct message to Peter who had recently affirmed that Jesus was the Messiah but then sought to dissuade Jesus of the suffering this would bring. Last week, we heard how Mary, in her love and devotion to Jesus had understood this painful reality, whilst all the others were in denial. She demonstrated her love for him with the same extravagance that he showed for all people.

As his ministry unfolded, we saw relationships becoming more polarised. As Jesus taught with an authority and freedom that none of the religious leaders of his day did, he broke down all the barriers that came between people and God. He revealed to them the true nature of a God who loved and cared for the marginalised and the poor and the outcast, bringing respect and healing and fulfilment of body and mind to everyone, tailored uniquely to their individual needs. As Jesus taught and lived a life reflective of the empathy God has for everyone, the crowds flocked to him and sought more from him. Some tried to mould him to what they expected him to be – not just a leader with spiritual authority, but a strong powerful warrior leader to cast aside the tyranny of occupying enemies. His growing popularity was tinged with out of control hero-worship and celebrity status. Some threatened to make him a figurehead for every cause of rebellion and liberation, whether peaceful or violent.

His growing popularity with ordinary people, increasingly threatened the religious leaders who feared that they would lose their power and control over the people they were supposed to be serving. Jesus faced growing hostility from the authorities, with a barrage of trivial but barbed questions and direct threats – seeking to undermine Jesus' own confidence in his calling, whilst also sowing seeds of doubt amongst the crowds and even amongst his followers. Was Judas a victim of this atmosphere of falsehoods and suspicion seeking to cast doubts on Jesus?

This is the backdrop to Jesus' preparations for the important Passover festival in Jerusalem. Crowds flocking from all

over the world in their duty to make at least one pilgrimage to the temple at Passover. Religious leaders threatened by Jesus' ability to expose how much their teaching was based on self-interest and hunger to retain power. The occupying authorities always seeing religious gatherings as events within which terrorists could hide in order to strike a blow for freedom. The weak and brutal bully Herod kept in power on the one condition that no headlines from this troublesome land reached the ears of the unpredictable and fickle emperor.

How far was Jesus prepared to go, in this cauldron of injustice?

Reflect on that scenario. Leaders making decisions based on fear of losing popularity and power. Injustices everywhere. Fake news used as a tool to divide the cry for justice into individual causes fighting each other. Big occasions that draw huge excitable crowds providing a great target for anyone wanting to get their own cause into the news. Security forces nervous and on knife-edge, suspecting that anything might happen: seeing threats even where there are none. Those responsible for ensuring a safe and fulfilling society, completely out of their depth, and trying to keep out of the headlines until there is some good news that they can claim as entirely created by their leadership. Far too familiar for comfort?

Pilgrims from all over Galilee full of Jesus' teaching share exciting stories as they rub shoulders with the crowds from round the world. Does their enthusiasm and passion turn into their pilgrimage into a demonstration march for justice, to put their Messiah on a pedestal? Do the authorities become ever-more nervous about where this is leading, escalating their aggressions towards Jesus? Does Judas' imagination get carried away with ideas to make a bigger impact? Do James and John get carried away, so that they argue over their importance? Does Jesus see how out-of-control this is becoming, despite choosing a demeaning beast of burden rather than a warhorse on which to ride into Jerusalem? Is that why he stops in the procession and weeps over the city?

Arriving in Jerusalem, with crowds shouting his praises – *Hosannah, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*, Jesus goes straight to the temple where he sees that its outer courts taken over by commerce – sacrifices sold at inflated prices and tourists forced to change their money into currency only usable in the temple. This place was reserved for prayer by women and the gentiles. Many coming arriving with him prevented from worship. He is angry at the depth of injustice: discrimination against the poor and the marginalised and allowing profiteering to gain a hold at the heart of what should have been a place of sanctuary and worship.

Jesus makes a stand for justice. He is there boldly symbolising the peaceful nature but encouraging that freedom for justice. He is there as he shines new light on scripture. He is there in the temple, in righteous indignation throwing out the corruption. He is there at supper with his friends – preparing them for his departure. He is there as he tells Simon that he must lead the disciples once he is gone, despite knowing that in his weakness he will deny Jesus. He is there acknowledging that Judas must do what he feels is right, and still, he will be forgiven. He is there when they come in force to arrest him and he refuses to defend himself, he is there in the mockery, allowing the fury and lies and fake justice to be thrown at him, and still, he accepts it. He is there, as he makes arrangements for his mother to be adopted by John as she will feel abandoned. He goes all the way.

How far are you prepared to go? For justice? For the victims and the marginalised and the outcasts? For creation and its sustainable future?

Scripture Luke 23:13-34a – *Jesus sentenced and crucified*

Prayers

O God of justice, we hear the cry of injustice calling us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross. A little of the light which has come into the world is snuffed out when we fail to stand up for justice. As we take this Lenten journey, guide us towards the darkness of the cross, emboldening us to rise to the call of each new challenge placed before us, as we trust in your promises, revealing the power of transformation, and the hope of resurrection.

In silent prayer now, lift up your concerns for creation and the world ... Our Father ...

Hymn: STF 285 *Were you there? (African American Traditional)*

<https://youtu.be/M19V8owRTA4>

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when God raised him from the dead?
Were you there when God raised him from the dead?
Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when God raised him from the dead?

Blessing:

Go and follow your call to discipleship as far as it leads, knowing that you have the blessing and support of your Lord, Jesus Christ, who has walked this walk before and will walk it again alongside you.