

**Sixth Sunday of Lent,
Palm Sunday, 10th March 2022**



Dear Friends,

‘We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ (Luke 23: 41)

Reading Gospel accounts of the Passion of Christ is a salutary occupation at the best of times, but somehow, with the atrocities of war against the Ukrainian people on our hearts, Luke’s description of events feels all the more devastating.

Pilate has a pang of conscience and says, *‘I find no basis for a charge against this man.’* (Luke 23:4) and even when he cements his relationship with Herod, Pilate still finds no justification to do anything more than rebuke Jesus and set Him free. And yet he is weak. The taunts of the crowds win him over. His desire for power at any cost prove to be the death knell Jesus knew was coming.

As the terrible events of His crucifixion unfold, we then hear the words of one of the criminals hanging either side of Jesus rebuking the other with these words: *‘We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’*



‘Pray Peace for Ukraine’ by Georgie Melksham

What, I wonder have the innocent people of Ukraine done to deserve the suffering they are enduring? How can the Russian soldiers justify their actions? Even if they are following orders because they fear for their own lives, what can possibly justify the accounts we hear from places like Yahidne, a town 80 miles north of Kiev, where men, women and children have been taken from their homes at gunpoint and held in the basement of the local school for four weeks?

There is no real answer to this question. Who knows what was going through the assailants' heads and hearts as they carried out these actions. In the same way, who can say what those buying for Jesus' blood were really thinking and feeling? What we know for sure is the capacity of human beings for evil.



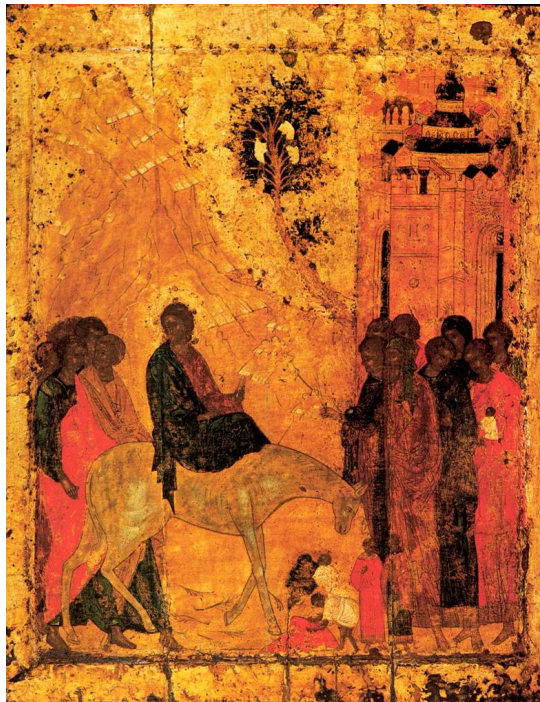
'Shine' by Mike Moyers

As helpless and as sickened as we might be feeling by everything we are powerless to change, there is something we can each of us do. We can pledge to live our own lives in the way of Christ. We can offer every second of the air we are blessed to breathe working for peace, for justice, and for love of the other.

This Palm Sunday evening, 10th April, our Benefice will be holding a service of Evensong to pray for the people of Ukraine at 6pm in St Mary's Church, Chilbolton. Everyone is welcome to come along. Equally, if this is not possible for you, then I encourage you to sit quietly wherever you are at 6pm, and if you can, light a candle. Take some time to pray for peace in our world, to pray for those suffering, fearful and starving, and pledge to do all you can to personally work for good. This may be giving a donation to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal at <https://www.dec.org.uk/> Or it may be you decide to think differently about your relationships with those around you.

The way we choose to think about ourselves and others carries a huge impact in the world. If we act through the lens of selfishness and greed, we treat those around us badly; we become angry or persecutory and the consequences hurt others deeply. We are each of us tarnished by the negative and sinful actions of others. Now is the perfect time to make lasting changes in our own attitudes as we repent of our sins and strive to lead new and faithful commitments to our Lord and Saviour.

A wonderful example of exactly this point has just occurred as I sit lost in the desolation of my thoughts! A dear friend has messaged and asked if Caroline and I might like a Costa Coffee takeaway to cheer our afternoon. The gift of Flat White coffees appeared with these words and a beautiful smile: *'We can't save the whole world unfortunately, but we can try and make it a little better in our own way.'*



Russian Icon of the Triumphal entry into Jerusalem – Cathedral of the Annunciation, Moscow

Let the passion of Christ fill your heart this Palm Sunday. Enjoy the donkeys at services if you are lucky enough to stroke their soft ears and bask in the presence of their calmness. Wherever you are, I pray you will take time to ponder the love of Christ who has given His very life for you. That He sets us free from the stain of sin is no small thing. How will we pledge to repay Him? The answer is love.

With my love in the Passion of Christ,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin,
Rector, The Downs Benefice

This week, with Ukraine on our hearts, we are blessed to have the thoughts and experiences of Pat Lloyd, who worships at St Mary's, Chilbolton, and who has forged meaningful relationships with the Association of Girl Guides in Belarus.

BELARUS CONNECTION – Pat Lloyd



I first met up with a small group of girls from Belarus in 1999. They were over here for a camp visit in Hampshire, and Hants North Guides were to be their home hosts for a week. These girls were sponsored by their villages as they wanted to be Girl Guides. Belarus had banned Girl Guides up to that point.

In 2001, I went out to Belarus with a group of Rangers (16 +), 2 Trainers and two other leaders to camp with them, receive home hospitality - and the trainers were to train leaders for their units. Our arrival was a bit nerve-racking as we were greeted by two security men, but we talked our way through. We were put into ramshackle minibuses with our Guiding friends, who were waiting for us, and taken through back roads to our camp.

The camp was not as we expected as it consisted of a very dilapidated building with basic amenities, but being true Guides we made the most of it. Our project for the week was to work with the children of the village and teach them skills and games. We had taken several games with us, and the cricket bats and footballs were very popular. Craft is always, even now, in short supply. Food was very basic and the cooking equipment was antiquated to say the least.

Our home hospitality was great - the families made us very welcome and, in some cases, gave up their beds and slept with their neighbours in order to accommodate us. Everything was very basic. Everyone was keen to speak to us as we were from another country and we all felt honoured that we were there.

I have now made 4 trips all told, and every time there have been improvement in travel, and roads are no longer pot-holed. In Minsk, the capital, the improvements are amazing - lovely shopping malls underground, with restaurants, etc. The airport is not a shack anymore, and there are lots of food shops in the town. The new library is out of this world.



Source: Girlguiding, Belarus – Twitter

However, in the houses, we did not speak of politics. That dialogue was strictly undertaken outside due to fear of bugging. We were on our last visit and met with a lot of dignitaries including a sly KGB man, but we got the wink from our Guiding friends. He left very quickly realising that we were just Girl Guides playing games with children. We support the Girl Guides every year, we pay their HQ rent. (I say HQ - it is a cupboard in a block of offices!) We send out craft items to Belarus, as these are still unavailable out there.

Our visits have been memorable. We learned a lot of their persecution from the Germans during the wars. It makes me shudder to write it. They are not happy with their present President, and our friends kept away from the protests due to the severe punishments they might endure as a consequence of attending.

Nearly every town has an orphanage, with up to 1000 children. Vodka is cheaper than water so there is a lot of neglect to the children. We met a doctor who looks after these children for little pay.

There is little meat in the shops and everyone grows their own veg and fruit where they can.

We are worried about our friends at the moment, very little info is coming out, we can only hope and pray for the best.

I hope this has given you a little insight as to our friendship? I could say more, but on the whole, we have enjoyed our visits and we hope that the girls will be able to come over again for a camp very soon - and likewise for us to go over there again.

Pat Lloyd

Collect Prayer for Palm Sunday

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross:
Grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.



'Wooden Palmesel' by Marie-Lan Nguyen

Luke 23:1-49 – The Passion of Christ

Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.' So Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'

'You have said so,' Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no basis for a charge against this man.' But they insisted, 'He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.' On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.'

But the whole crowd shouted, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder).

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, 'Crucify him! Crucify him.' For the third time he spoke to them: 'Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.' But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.



The Crucifixion of Jesus

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.'

For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.' The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'

There was a written notice above him, which read: This is the King of the Jews.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'



The Death of Jesus

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.' When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Schedule of Services

Now that all national Coronavirus restrictions have been lifted, it is no longer necessary to book seats in our parishes for services. Neither is it mandatory for you to wear masks in church. However, Coronavirus is still very much with us. There are a number of people in our villages with it at present, so we are encouraging people to observe social distancing measures.

As our services begin to open up again, we have a wide range of sacramental and lay-led services on offer. Of particular note, Peace and Wholeness begins again on 20th March at St Catherine's, Littleton. St Mary's, Crawley and St Stephen's Sparsholt are enjoying new lay-led Morning Worship services on 3rd and 4th Sundays respectively.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>10th April Palm Sunday</i>	<i>Palm Sunday Service with Wh</i>		Holy Communion with a Donkey Procession	Palm Sunday Service with a Donkey Procession	Palm Sunday Service
	6pm – Benefice Evensong to pray for Ukraine and World Peace				
<i>14th April Maundy Thursday</i>				6pm - Holy Communion with Washing of the Feet	
<i>15th April Good Friday</i>	<i>With Wh</i>	10am - Easter Garden	12 noon - Good Friday Meditation		3pm - Good Friday Meditation
<i>17th April EASTER SUNDAY</i>	Easter Holy Communion	Easter Service	Easter Holy Communion	Easter Holy Communion	Easter Service
<i>24th April</i>			Morning Prayer	Morning Worship	8am – BCP Holy Communion
<i>27th April WEDNESDAY</i>			Holy Communion		
<i>1st May</i>	Morning Prayer		4pm – Café Church		

<i>8th May</i>			Holy Communion followed by APCM		Morning Prayer and Pet Service
<i>15th May</i>	Holy Communion	Morning Worship	6pm – Peace & Wholeness	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)	
<i>22nd May</i>			Christian Aid Morning Prayer Service	Morning Worship	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)
<i>26th May Ascension Day</i>			7.30am – Holy Communion followed by Breakfast in the Church Room		
<i>29th May</i>		5 th Sunday Benefice Holy Communion			