

**Sixth Sunday of Lent,
Palm Sunday, 28th March 2021**



Dear Friends,

‘Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.’ (Mark 14:9)

This past Tuesday, 23rd March, marked the first anniversary of the first Coronavirus Lockdown experienced in the United Kingdom as the world grappled with the spread and life-limiting consequences of this deadly respiratory disease.

Strangely, a year on, I am still coming across people in our own communities who have yet struggled to fully comprehend the enormity of the situation we continue to face – or the reasons why churches across the country have made the deeply painful decision to suspend services in order to save lives. Despite the blessings of excellent vaccines being developed and rolled out to many groups of elderly and vulnerable people, Coronavirus remains as deadly as ever. Being vaccinated offers individuals a fantastic protection against the virus from 3 or 4 weeks after you've had the first dose, and seems to prevent many of the acute symptoms from developing in people who catch the disease. However, being vaccinated does not stop people being infected with it, or spreading it to others. This is why our churches are being very cautious about re-opening. We are very much looking forward to our Benefice being able to gather together again to celebrate Easter Day in person! Do see ‘Schedule of Services’ below to book your seats!



Daffodil Cross planted by Linda Hodgson at St Stephen’s Church, Sparsholt

Among the many poignant experiences of this first anniversary, I was truly blessed to be invited by the staff and residents of Westholme Care Home to formally open their new Coronavirus Memorial Garden. As staff stood, socially distanced in the garden, it was a deeply emotional privilege to listen to Care Home Manager, Christine Fermor, pay a heartfelt tribute, both to the residents who have sadly lost their lives to the virus in this past year, and to the Care Home staff and those who work alongside them, as they have selflessly served the residents and their families, often putting their own lives and families at risk in the process.



Coronavirus Memorial Garden at Westholme Care Home, Winchester

The highlight for me, was being able to talk with one dear resident, Malcolm, through the window of the Home's sitting room as he watched me cut the ribbon and say some prayers. I have known Malcolm for many years now, and though he has been suffering with 'locked-in syndrome' through dementia, something made him look right at me, and his smile of recognition was amongst the brightest gifts I have ever received.

The Memorial Garden can be seen through the hedge from the Harestock Road. It has two beds and a pergola at each end of the garden, and it is hoped it will become a sensory space for residents as much as a spiritual place for families to come and remember their loved ones. In the Heart Garden, families have donated rose bushes to commemorate their loved ones. In the Rainbow Garden, which is decorated by pastilles painted by residents, as the flowers grow they will form a beautiful rainbow!

The pergolas need our help! Funds have run out, and they have no money to buy the 4 Clematis plants they need to climb over the wire pergola frames to create archways into the garden. I have promised to buy them as a gift from our Benefice. The average cost of a Clematis plant is £15 +/- . If any of you reading this would like to contribute towards the purchase of a Clematis, I would love to hear from you!



In my Palm Sunday newsletter last year, I wrote how, in these times of uncertainty, illness and grief, it is love that will hold us together, calm our fears, give us strength and bring us hope. This remains true for us all today. Standing in that embryonic Memorial Garden on Tuesday, surrounded by grieving and exhausted Care Home staff, I felt overwhelmed by the number of small rose bushes which represented a life lost to Coronavirus in these past twelve months.

Each plant tells its own poignant story of suffering, anguish, care and loss. As they grow, these roses will also tell out the story of love which surrounds the memory of each person, and will become a riotous blaze of colour at the height of summer. I pray that, in this joyous display, people will come to see the meaning of Easter for themselves. For the greatest love of all is the eternal and unconditional love of God. Jesus brings us the full power of His love as He journeys to the Cross to set us free from the tragedy of our earthly lives, through the promise of eternity in His paradise.



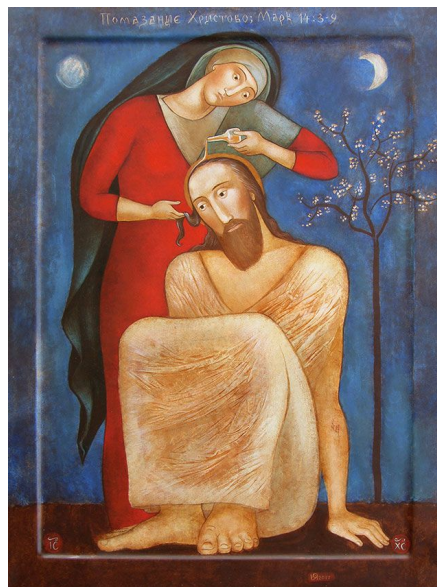
'Christ among doctors' by Bernardino Luini

As we arrive at Palm Sunday in our Lenten devotions, perhaps it is all too easy to get caught up in the celebratory mood of Jesus' procession across the Kidron Valley and into Jerusalem. After all, Palm Sunday means that Easter Day is only a week away – and, as a little girl said in a Zoom call to me recently, *'I'm excited for Easter because Jesus lets me eat His eggs then!'*

Whilst that little theologian has an excuse for focussing on eating chocolate (at least she knew Easter was about Christ and not the Easter Bunny, which is more than can be said for our supermarkets!!), we would be wise to remember for ourselves how Jesus is our divine care-giver. He came to earth to share God's passionate love with us. He tended the sick, healed the lame and the outcast, and His selfless compassion for those in need knew no bounds. Even as He hung dying in agony on the cross, He found the grace to bless the repentant criminal who hung alongside him, and ensured His distraught mother would have the cultural and emotional security and solace she needed in John, the disciple Jesus loved. So Jesus has always been with us.

He is in every second of our lives – amidst our agonies for our loved ones where He is the hands and feet and skills of our doctors, nurses, care workers, funeral directors, refuse collectors, power providers and everyone who works to make our world a safer, healthier and more compassionate place. *'Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'*

Reflected in the faces of the nurses and care-givers at Westholme and in all places where unconditional love is freely given, how Jesus' words come to life! For the actions of the woman who pours out costly nard upon Him is mirrored in all those whose acts of duty, devotion and selflessness work to honour others in our modern world.



'Unction of Christ' by Julia Stankova

This Palm Sunday, in these strange times of closed church buildings and online worship, we need the empathy and humanity of our Lord and Saviour just as intensely as those who gathered around Jesus on that first Palm Sunday. May God who came to this earth in meekness and humility guard you and guide you and bring you His peace.

With my love in the Passion of Christ,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Schedule of Services

Our churches are currently closed for in-person services in order to model the Government's request of us all to stay at home and beat the spread of Coronavirus. However, we are hoping to be able to relax these restrictions over Easter. Please see below for a schedule of services for **Holy Week and Easter Day**. Some are online video services and others are in-person. **You will need to book your seats** for these church services by contacting our Benefice Office on (01962) 880845 or by email at: office@downsbenefice.org.uk

There is a reflective worship video for **Palm Sunday** for you to watch on our Benefice website. A recorded service for Maundy Thursday will be uploaded during next week. We also have many links to a wide range of digital resources from across the Church of England and within our Diocese at: <http://downsbenefice.org/>

DAY	DATE	SERVICE	CH	CR	LI	SP	WH
Palm Sunday	28 th March	No In-Church Services – There will be a short, recorded Liturgy of the Palms Service on our website					
Maundy Thursday	1 st April	No In-Church Services – There will be a Holy Communion Video Service on our website					
Good Friday	2 nd April	Easter Garden with Time of Reflection		10am			
Good Friday	2 nd April	Time of Reflection	2pm				
Easter Sunday	4 th April	Easter Communion			9.30am		
Easter Sunday	4 th April	Easter Family Service		10am			
Easter Sunday	4 th April	Easter Family Service				10am	
Easter Sunday	4 th April	Easter Communion	11am				
Easter Sunday	4 th April	Easter Family Service					10am

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.



Reading: Mark 14: 1-9 - The Plot to Kill Jesus and the anointing at Bethany

It was two days before the Passover. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her.

But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'