

SUNDAY 28TH MARCH LENT 6 – PALM SUNDAY

Thought for the Week: "What's in a Palm Cross?"

As part of our exploration of the significance of "what's in our Easter Packs" that have gone out to about eight hundred people in both Church communities and our three School communities alike, and being Palm Sunday (Sun 28th Mar) this weekend, I thought it would be good to maybe look up where the humble Palm Cross came from and what it can mean.



What I discovered was an incredibly diverse range of interpretation both amongst different Christian traditions; Catholic, Orthodox and the like, but also a similarly incredible diversity based around different parts of the world.

The origin as to why the residents of Jerusalem laid palm branches down for Jesus to ride over on that first "Palm Sunday" seems to go back to 2Kings 9 when the people "laid palm branches down" for their new King, King Jehu to ride over them. So, the palm branch being waved and laid down was a symbol of honour and enthronement. This would find strong echoes in the Greek and Roman world with branches from decorative trees being laid down upon the return, and the 'triumphal procession,' of a conquering and successful general.

Making this palm branch though into the form of a Cross seems to be a much later tradition and associated only with Christianity – tying together, literally, these apparently opposing thoughts and ideas of 'Kingship,' 'victory, and 'success' with 'death,' 'suffering' and 'sacrifice' making a single whole that appears to contradict itself and yet also speaks of some sort of strange and mysterious possibility.

When we look then at how Palm Sunday is celebrated around the world, we find various strands of this seeming incompatibility coming to the fore.

In many northern and eastern European countries where palm branches themselves would never grow, they take 'pussy-willow' instead to be the basis for garlands and floral tributes which each person carries both to and from Church, the first symbol of 'new life' and spring for all the other flowers following a harsh winter (the picture here is of a Polish Catholic Minister). Very much an emphasis on hope and on 'new beginnings.'



And it is the same amongst many Asian and Indian countries. In Kerala, in South India, where Christianity fused with the Brahman faith very early on, flower petals are thrown into the air at each mention of the word "Hosanna" in the reading of the Palm Sunday Gospel story, making an incredible and colourful spectacle. Again, an emphasis on hope, blessing, and 'new life.'



In Spain this idea of 'new life' takes on a twist whereby the palms (and Spain has the largest palm plantation in the world) are bleached white in the sun and then are woven into many intricate shapes but always associated with new life. The local folk tradition then links this to buying new

shoes for Palm Sunday, and it is still seen as 'bad luck' in that part of Spain if you are not wearing a new pair of shoes on Palm Sunday. (Great news for shoe shops and shoe manufacturers.)

So the emphasis is very much upon still upon the 'new.'

In parts of Wales Palm Sunday is also known as "Flowering Sunday" with the tradition stemming really from the 1800's onwards where people would visit the cemeteries and graves of loved ones on Palm Sunday, tidy them up, give them a hard spring clean and then cover the graves with flowers. This is partly thought to be associated with the idea that in many Methodist, and also Catholic, Churches the Saturday before Palm Sunday was known as "Lazarus Saturday," the day to commemorate when Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb as He arrived in Bethany on His way to Jerusalem for Palm Sunday.



Here then the emphasis is very much on the idea that all that Jesus was about to do in Holy Week was a working out of how He would gain authority and victory even over death itself and so make what He had achieved for Lazarus a 'forerunner' and example of what He would then be able to do for everyone else's loved ones for all time afterwards. The cleaning and the flowers symbolise, if you like, a commitment to that hope.



And finally, one of the strangest beliefs and practices associated with Palm Sunday is that held by various communities in England between the 15th and the 17th centuries where they would take a straw effigy of someone they called, "Jack - 'o' - Lent," meant to symbolise Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus, and the community would publicly beat it almost to nothing and then burn it on Palm Sunday. Whether this violence and outpouring of anger was directed towards Judas Iscariot personally or, as some commentators believe, more directed towards 'beating back' winter, we will never fully know.

But here there is certainly a desire to hold someone or something accountable for whatever has frustrated, wounded, or hurt that community over the long winter months, which at the time in rural England could be very harsh for ordinary agricultural workers.

All this description is not meant to be simply about a history lesson, more an insight into the incredible diversity of emotion, experience and feeling, people will be approaching this Holy Week and Easter. Some people will be very much in places which characterise those of Poland to Kerala, living out not just Palm Sunday, but the whole of Holy Week and Easter, pretty much as they always have done, keeping a sense of tradition, of optimism, family, hope and blessing.

Very much the 'life-giving' nature of the Cross.

For others, like those we spoke of from Wales' hard industrial valleys in the past, however, there has been much 'loss' over the course of this year. People may well be remembering loved ones, lost opportunities, lost relationships, all manner of situations, people and events, that call us into a time of 'grief' and of 'mourning.' Can we let our journey through Holy Week and the Cross lead us to that positive place where we know Jesus has indeed overcome the 'loss' and the death that so separates and eats away at us, letting the hope gently and persistently overtake grief and despair, just like the flowers impregnating and indeed overcoming the dark grey headstone and/or surround of a hard stone tomb?

And finally, what about those who find themselves full of anger, frustration, hurt and feelings of injustice at this time in their hearts and in their stories at this time. Although we may be shocked at the idea of beating and burning of effigies, this may be to be preferred in one sense to holding on to such deep and hurtful experiences or taking them out on others, animals, children, partners and the like. Behind it all, can we choose to let such powerful and self-destroying hurts go, not so much to an effigy but to the Cross?

However, you find yourself coming to this Easter, with whatever experiences and emotions, may you find not just the Palm Cross, but the whole experience of walking the way of Holy Week and Easter this year something that truly gives you hope, healing and new life.

Interestingly, although there is such great variety in the expressions of how various traditions and parts of the world express and experience Palm Sunday, nearly all of them involve the taking 'home' of some aspect of occasion, be it palms, pussy-willow, or whatever and so to be with the individual or the family throughout the year. An important reminder perhaps that Palm Sunday, and/or Holy Week, is not an occasion simply to be celebrated at arm's length but once a year in a distant Church somewhere before a distant God. Rather it was, and is, a 'daily' practice, and a personal one, and one which cost Jesus, and indeed costs us, dearly for it is to embrace the possibility of change and of new possibilities.

Matt Thomson.

[What is happening "Worship wise" concerning Easter?](#)



Services During Holy Week:

Thursday 1st April 6.00pm Maundy Thursday Passover Meal **Congresbury (Online)**

Friday 2nd April 10.30am Good Friday **Congresbury (Online)**

Sunday 4th April 6.00am Easter Day Dawn Service **Congresbury (Online)**

Sunday 4th April 10.30am Easter Day Agape and Renewal of Baptism Vows **Banwell (Online)**

Just to re-iterate all services throughout Holy Week will be **ONLINE ONLY**, however, both churches are open each day for private prayer.

Services can be accessed in the following ways :

Join us by watching **LIVE** via the "New Creation Facebook Page" :

<https://www.facebook.com/NewCreationChurches/> or catch up later on Facebook, via the New Creation website: <http://www.newcreationchurches.org.uk/> or New Creation YouTube Channel : <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXn34qIXIXBeOAmO1M1KbBw/>



For up-to-date information, please scan this QR code to go to our dedicated Easter page or visit <http://www.newcreationchurches.org.uk/easter-2021/>



Maundy Thursday

If you are not able to join us online but would still like to try a Messianic Passover at home, we will have copies of the *Haggadah* available in each of the churches.

For everyone who would like to have a Seder plate prepared, here are the ingredients you will need (along with a few alternatives), but if you are feeling adventurous, I've also included the recipe for *Kharoset*.

Ideas for Passover meals can be found with a quick 'Google' search, but a firm favourite from our shared Passovers past is lamb stew.



For the Seder Plate

Maror – horseradish

Kharoset—(use sweet chutney or honey)

Karpas – parsley (or a bitter herb)

Hard boiled egg

Lamb bone (or substitute a chicken bone)

A bowl of salt water

Fresh water

Matzah crackers

Wine or grape juice

And don't forget...

Candle

Napkins



Recipe for *Kharoset*

- 2 tart apples
- ½ cup walnuts
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 Tablespoon sweet red wine (or grape juice)
- Core the apples (it is not necessary to peethem).
- Chop the apples and walnuts together until finely chopped.
- With a wooden spoon, stir in the cinnamon, honey and wine.
- **This will serve 10-12 people—**
- 1 teaspoon to 1 Tablespoon per person on matzoh.

Painting a Pebble for Easter

We would like to invite you to paint an Easter design on a rock—any design you would like, whatever says Easter to you and place it at St Andrew's, Congresbury or Banwell where we have marked out a Cross in both

Churchyards. Please place your painted rocks to fill up the Cross this week before 2nd April ready for Easter, but you can keep adding after this date!

Easter Rock Painting

Bring your painted pebbles to form a cross in both Churchyards



Good Friday

For Good Friday we will be having an interactive journey through the Stations of the Cross so there are a few household items you may like to have to hand to engage with as we follow Christ's final human steps.



Good Friday 2021

Live Stream 10.30am

If you have these items to hand, we will be using them during the service on Good Friday



Hand
Sanitiser



Something
Wooden



A Nail



Sheet of
Paper



Candle



Easter Sunday

Hallelujah, Christ is Risen!

Join us at **6am** for a short Dawn Service (or watch a little later on catch up) and then at **10.30am** we will have the Easter Day Service, with an Agape Feast and our traditional renewal of Baptism Vows. Don't forget bread, juice and grapes to share in the Agape and a glass of water to renew your Baptism vows.



EASTER SUNDAY



Dawn Service 6.00am



Agape Service and Renewal of
Baptism Vows 10.30am



Easter FoodBank Donations

Thank you so much to everyone who has been so generous in their donations to the FoodBank, it is greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

