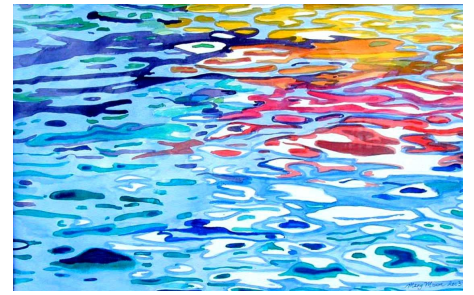




## Galaxies Evening Service 6 April 2008

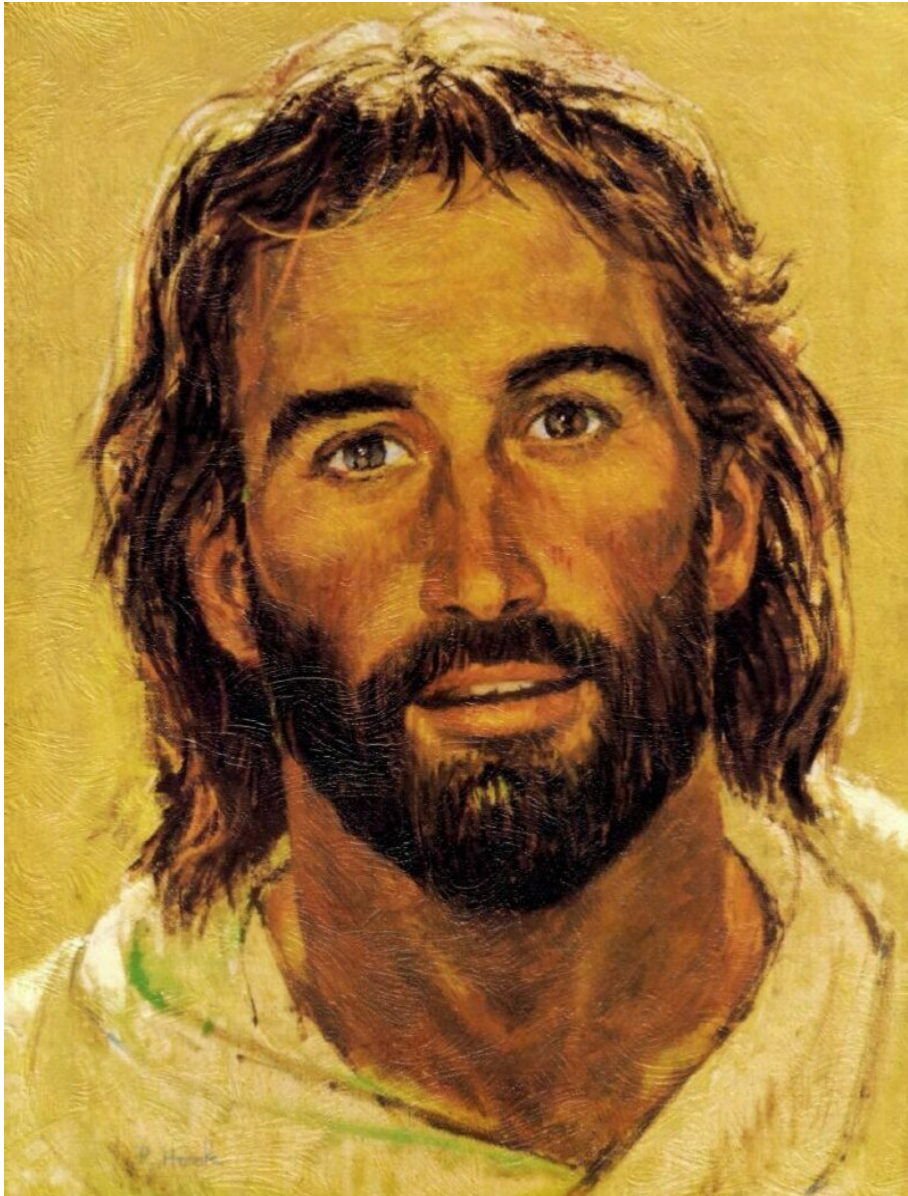
Service by Pete Cowley



### Welcome:

#### **Welcome to our service tonight**

Tonight's service theme is : **Easter**. What is Easter to us now, in this modern age where we can no longer believe in a bodily resurrection.



**Head of Christ – Francis Cook**

### Call to togetherness and sharing:

Leader: We are all part of the rhythm of life.

As we gather together to share of ourselves and our journey, may peace and love be with us.

All: May we be makers of the peace and givers of unbounded love.

## Passing the Peace:

**Leader:** Now that we are reminded that God the free Spirit shares itself with us, we can share our peace and love with one another.

Let us feel the power of the earth that holds us together.

Let us celebrate our gifts in song and dance.

Let us all rejoice in our power and our beauty.

**All:** We open our hearts to the mystery of God's love in all Creation. We carry in us the divine spark. The gift of love, which we share tonight, deepens us as people, deepens us as sisters and brothers.

Each person shares hugs, or whatever you are comfortable with, with those around them.



## Notices

### Reading:

Mark 11:7 - 11

### Reflection - Triumphal entry

The thing to notice about Mark's account of Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem is that there is a lot less interpretation than in Matthew or Luke. Matthew and Luke write it up large, interpreting the events by reference to the promise of the peaceful king of Zechariah 9:9, the Messiah who will come in humility, riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The more this story was told in the church, the more its details were altered and added to, to express the church's conviction that Jesus deliberately entered Jerusalem as Messiah, in fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy. That isn't at all clear in Mark, the first of our gospels. As the story stands in Mark, it's impossible to say what Jesus intended. There is a short-lived ripple of excitement in the crowd, but there is really no evidence that Jesus' entry was a spectacular event. As the Passion story continues, the Jewish authorities don't act against Jesus because of the so-called "triumphal" entry, and he himself doesn't make any capital out of it.

As Mark tells the story, when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, it was festival time. The crowds greeted Jesus and his followers as they would greet any pilgrim: "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" The second acclamation in verse ten was most likely added later by the church, to bring out what, in hindsight, they recognised to be the significance of this event. Verse ten is only in Mark, and Jewish tradition never speaks of King

David as "our father," so referring to "the coming kingdom of our father David" is not the sort of phrase we might expect from a non-Jewish church.

So what have we got? Jesus enters Jerusalem at Festival Time. There is a brief flurry of excitement. He is greeted by the crowd liturgically. He goes to the temple, tourist-style, has a look around, and then returns to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

Mark tells his story in a very reserved manner. It is quite different from the messianic over-exposure of Matthew and Luke. And by his very restraint, Mark is trying to say something to us about the ambiguity of our festivals. Mark's overriding theme is that the divine authority of Jesus as the Christ is to be found only in his lowly, lonely journey to suffering and death. So a lot of festival ra-ra can prove to be deceptive. When people get excited, especially in a crowd, they can get carried away. They say and do things they don't really mean. Mark shows that Jesus isn't seduced by the crowd. He's not impressed by their acclamations. He just quietly goes his way. And fair enough; because within a few days, the same crowd that welcomed him into Jerusalem will be screaming, "Crucify him!"

Personally, I don't set a lot of store on the kind of religious responses that are made amidst excitement and enthusiasm, at festivals and camps and large religious gatherings. The dynamics of the crowd are too ambiguous. That doesn't mean they serve no useful purpose. Provided we recall the ambiguity and guard ourselves against deception and folly, we really can get a buzz from the crowd. And even if we sometimes say and do things we don't altogether mean. It is still a good thing to remind ourselves of our best and highest values, even if we can't always live up to them. But honesty does demand that we recognise the ambiguity.

The main point of Mark's account of the entry into Jerusalem, though, is to show Jesus supremely in control. Things turn out exactly as he says. When he needs a donkey, there it is. He's got authority. He's in the know. And he's got the power to make things happen. Mark's point is that Jesus goes to his death knowingly, willingly, and in control. He's not a victim, overpowered by force of circumstance. He's fulfilling his destiny.

Now I have some problems with this. It's the view that suffering can do us good; or at least, that it can do somebody good. It's the idea that God wills suffering (or the absence of suffering) for us. It's the idea that Jesus' execution was planned by God down to the last gory detail. And none of it makes sense to me. Mind you, it didn't altogether make sense to the early church either. From the very beginning, they detected a certain ambiguity in the suffering of Jesus. If you look at Peter's sermon in Acts chapter three, you will find Peter wanting to say both that the Messiah had to suffer, in accordance with the will of God, and yet the Jewish people were responsible and guilty for executing Jesus (Acts 3:13-15,18). I don't see how you can have it both ways. If God planned all along for Jesus to be killed, you can hardly blame the people who were mere instruments of divine will.

I can go this far with Mark—our suffering is not meaningless. God binds Godself to us all in every moment. Every hurt we endure is experienced by God. God's love is big enough to receive all our pain, and to rescue it and us, from futility and finitude, from mute suffering and meaningless misery. God embraces every moment of our existence, and preserves it in the divine life and love long after we ourselves are dead and forgotten.

That much I'm wanting to say with Mark. The death of Jesus was not a horrible, irredeemable mistake. It wasn't a meaningless tragedy. God's love and power did, in fact, redeem Jesus' suffering and death, and the church was born in the splendour of a resurrection faith.

Where I part company with Mark is in his assertion that Jesus was destined to suffer and die on the cross. I do not, can not, believe that God wills suffering, let alone that God plans it. I believe that God wills only good, but the kind of good that really is good, because there is a choice.

The ambiguity of our suffering, and of Jesus' suffering, is that none of it is lost on God, and all of it is redeemed by God, but neither does it have to happen. God's saving purposes could have been fulfilled without the crucifixion. The God I worship is not a blood-drinking ogre who demands meat on Fridays.

The ambiguity of our festivals. The ambiguity of our suffering. As year follows year, and we enter Passion Week, the most important of the Christian festivals. I want to suggest that we most truly keep Easter, not when we talk and sing hymns about a broken body and spilt blood and a Christ who died to drown our sins. Rather, we most truly keep Easter when, away from the crowd, we quietly live the uncompromising witness to God's all-inclusive love that led Jesus to Calvary in the first place. When we show by our actions, and not just by our words, that the God we serve comforts the sorrowing, mourns with the bereaved, binds up the broken hearted, and liberates the oppressed. We most truly keep Easter when we cease to care too much what others think and say about us, when we are content to look around, and quietly go our way, and do what needs to be done.

David Bromell

From Songs from the midst of the flames (biblical reflections on an inclusive church)

### The Lord's Prayer - Jim Cotter

**All: Eternal Spirit Earth-maker, Pain-Bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be.  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:  
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed by peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.  
With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever.  
Amen.**

### The blessing

Let us stop for a moment and calm our thoughts

as we prepare ourselves for radical action, just like Jesus:

- to act with peaceful, careful listening; even in the face of aggression
- to calmly and lovingly challenge duplicity, bigotry, prejudice and injustice wherever we encounter it.
- to accept people with loving-kindness in all our interactions.
- to share our joy and blessings freely with others.

