# Let’s Bring Ourselves

## Week 6 - Sunday 24March

Today is Palm Sunday. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey,
he found himself enveloped in celebration and devotion. This crowd
were keen to make their faithful response. Whether it was to calm the
donkey or give Jesus the ‘red carpet’ treatment, they responded by offering
their clothes. Clothes in those days were handmade, unique and precious. In laying them down, they laid down something of themselves. Our habits matter; habits of prayer, hope, kindness and unity bring great joy to God’s heart and help to build God’s Kingdom, but the faithful response God loves most is when we bring our unique, precious selves.

## Sermon Outline

#### ‘Many in the crowds spread their garments on the road ahead of him’ (Mark 11:8 NLT)

### Introduction:

The Palm Sunday story is all about being available to God, so people might find it helpful to think about times when they’ve sensed God asking them to do something or go somewhere. How ready and willing were they? How did God use them?

You could also play a game which involves people making things available: you divide the congregation into two teams, each with a ‘runner’ (maybe a child or young person), then shout out a series of items which the runner needs to get from someone on their team and bring to the front. You’d usually start with easy things like keys, a Bible or ‘something green’, and progress to more difficult things like a sock or a greetings card. The team whose runner brings the object to the front fastest wins.

The Palm Sunday story is also about change. There’s something strange and prescient about it. Perhaps it doesn’t help that we know the next bit of Jesus’ story, so all the celebration feels rather fake and hollow, but there’s also a sense of unfamiliarity about it. Jesus was doing things he didn’t normally do.

* He was going to Jerusalem – something he did only very occasionally and only when he was certain the time was right, because it was a dangerous place for him.
* He was riding on a donkey, which wouldn’t have been a regular mode of transport for a healthy man in his early 30s.
* He was the centre of attention, when he so often entered places unobtrusively.Availability and change … this is a story of being available to God to step into a new era.

### People made their resources available

It seems that Jesus and his disciples had made some useful connections with families who lived on the outskirts of Jerusalem. For instance, Mary, Martha and Lazarus’ home in Bethany was a pit-stop for them. The place where they ate the last supper clearly belonged to someone they knew. And on that day of journeying into Jerusalem for the last time, Jesus knew of a family who would lend him their colt. They only had to say his name and that would be deposit enough for the use of a precious possession.

Having borrowed a donkey, Jesus then needed to borrow his disciples’ cloaks to make it rideable. It’s an unusual picture – a king who has none of his own resources and needs the generosity of his subjects before he can complete his mission.

* Have you ever reflected on the wonderful truth that God needs things from us? God is entirely self-sufficient yet chooses to rely on us for things.
* How willing are we to put our possessions and resources at God’s disposal?
* Were the family surprised that what Jesus needed that day was their untamed young donkey? Is Jesus asking us to offer up things we don’t think could possibly be any use to him?

### People made themselves available

It wasn’t just Jesus’ friends who were ready and willing that day. As he rode into Jerusalem, crowds came to celebrate his coming and join his cause. They proclaimed him Messiah (Mark 11:9) and shouted about his Kingdom coming (v10). These aren’t curious bystanders any more; these are enthusiastic converts.

It seems they wanted to do more than just shout. They took off their cloaks and laid them on the road. Maybe that was to soften the ground for the jittery young colt, but maybe it was also a symbolic laying down of themselves for the cause. In those days, your outer cloak was one of the most valuable things you owned. With no factories and production lines, it would have been handmade, unique to you, and would have in some way reflected who you were.

* Reflect for a moment on the truth that God wants you more than any of the things you can do. You are more important to God than your habits, gifts and talents.
* What does it mean to make ourselves wholly available to God?
* How have your habits of faithfulness made you more available to God?

### Jesus made himself available

Those enthusiastic converts would be shouting a very different chant just a few days later. On this day they are ready to declare Jesus King of the coming Kingdom; a few days later, they were ready to condemn him to death.

Entering Jerusalem was dangerous for Jesus. His ministry had angered some very powerful people, and he must have known he was on the way to something terrible – and yet he went. He didn’t hide away or flee to a different land. He went into that cauldron of rage and vengeance … for you and me.

* They laid down their cloaks; he laid down his life. Reflect for a moment on something which you found it difficult to lay down, speaking your thoughts and feelings to the One who laid down everything to bring you life.
* How does Jesus’ laying down of his life help us to live out the habits of our faithful response?

### Conclusion:

As we come to the close of Lent, we draw ever nearer to the central tenet of our faith: the faithfulness of the God who chose to give up his life for us. In the light of that self-giving, that self-emptying, every faithful habit of ours seems flimsy. Yet as we let love and gratitude wash over us, we find ourselves renewed in our resolve to build those habits and to live out our faithful response to God.

## Prayer and Worship Ideas

### ‘Take my life’

Use Laura Rowsell’s adaptation of the song ‘Take my life and let it be’ to help people respond to God’s invitation.

You can find the song here:

<https://www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/discipleship/covenantsunday2024>

### Paving the way

Jesus wasn’t entering a church or worship gathering; he was entering a troubled city. As the people laid down their cloaks and palm branches, they were making a way for him into the city.

Are we hoping Jesus will just come to us, to our worship gatherings, or are we longing for him to come into our village/town/city?

Ask people to spend some time discussing in pairs/groups what it means for us to help make a way for Jesus to be seen and known in the place where we live.

### Making a cloak path

Cut out pictures of all sorts of garments, from a magazine or catalogue, and make them available somewhere in the room, along with coloured pens. Invite people to pick a garment which they like the look of, then to write the name of a place, organisation, activity or people-group they would like Jesus to come to in your town.

Run a long stretch of lining paper along the floor or wall and invite people to stick their garments and prayers on it, making your own ‘cloak path’ for Jesus.

### Into the new

Palm Sunday marks a sea-change. Nothing will ever be the same again. There are moments of church life which feel like that too, not least Covid.

Different personalities view change differently – for some it’s a joy and for some it’s a struggle. If you know your corps is going through a transition, you could invite a couple of people to talk about times when they’ve made themselves available to God, gone through a transition, and have a testimony to tell of God’s faithfulness. Having heard the testimonies, invite people to pray in faith for the new season you’re entering.