

Palm Sunday Relection 2020

A character in a 1970s UK children's comedy, called *Worzel Gummidge* (a scarecrow) asked his long-time but disdainful girlfriend (Aunt Sally) if she could write the time of day on a piece of paper for him so that, at least twice a day, he would know the time.

9:45



On a railway platform, equally long ago if not more so, there were two clocks which always ran 6 minutes apart from each other. An angry traveller asked the Station Master what was the point of having 2 clocks which told different times to which he replied that there was no sense in having two that told the same time. You could literally say that time was two-faced.

One of the challenges of being a preacher is that every year (or at least every 3 years) the same readings come round and we are required to say something new and different. The snag is that you've heard it all before, there is, as Ecclesiastes says, nothing new under the sun. Once you been going to church for 6 years, you'll have heard the lectionary (the collection of set readings for each Sunday) go round twice because it's on a 3 year cycle. On some special days the readings are the same every year so then the challenge is harder.

This year might be different though with things being as they are, in a state of flux and fear. We now need and long for the stability of regular things happening at regular times, going to work, doing the shopping, visiting gran, school activities, pizza on Friday – or whatever other activities punctuated and marked your day, week, month, season, year. You might be glad just to be able to go to church, gather in one place without a metre measure and share the peace and bread and wine and pray and sing and be normal, regular Christians.

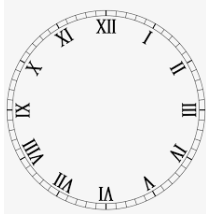


With Palm Sunday we visit not only the same basic story line, the lead up to the Passion narratives, but we may also visit our guilt, recognising in the crowds that cheered, the same crowds that called for the release of Barabbas, and, as is the nature of crowds, we are there with them. We cheer and celebrate the entry in to Jerusalem and then, in Passion week, we watch the events of the Last Supper, washing feet, betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion. We are audience, onlookers, not central players. We are observers: some of us are witnesses who tell others what we have seen. But it is, nevertheless,

give or take, the same every year. We move on from the event, we process and progress though the year, now Easter, now Pentecost, now harvest, now Advent, now Christmas, now Lent.

So what makes for real difference? Coronavirus is giving us Difference. No contact, no outings, no gatherings. This year really is a Different Easter. Some of us will lose loved ones or know of illness and next year we will mark this time with grief and relief. But mark it we will, as days crossed off on the calendar (there is so much encouragement to be had in paper calendars!). It comes to pass as plagues have done before and as Springs, Summers, Autumns and Winters have done before. This year the clock face is 6 minutes out, next year it will be in synch again – but a great deal of

experience and time will have passed before then. There will be a time when the piece of paper we have in our heart's pocket will tell the right time again. This year's Palm Crosses will still make next year's ash for the Wednesday that marks the beginning of Lent. What we cannot do is change the pace of time. We can chase it, waste it, push it, run out of it, try to put it behind us, look forward to it, ignore it, forget it, but we cannot make the days go faster or slower; a second is always a second. We may have more daylight but we do not have more hours.



There will be a time when time is done with, when we engage with the eternity Christ speaks of and promises us. You can choose how you think of this event, either at the point of your death or at the Second Coming, but linear time will come to an end we are told. The Resurrection is the beginning of this -if Eternity can be said to have a beginning! When we accept that we fail, that we are the mob of the crowd and the individual who screws up, that we are as bad as everyone else and yet individually liable, when we acknowledge and own this, and say sorry, then the crucifixion, which happened centuries ago, becomes a contemporary event for us as Christ takes our place and punishment. But, *then* the Resurrection is ours too and we will rise with Christ, forgiven and transformed.

Every Easter is set at 5 to 12. Will we look on and leave or look on and stay? Will we flee or will we watch? Will we help take down the corpse and then go, days later, to find the empty tomb or will we condemn Jesus to death, not risen in our hearts and lives? We Christians are described as an Easter people, some of us are stuck, ground-hog like, on Friday, watching shadows, rather than sunbeams, play.

I have just come back from walking my dogs. For the first time this spring I saw, around Onsøy, what I saw last spring in the Cotswold hills – snowdrops and crocuses and a butterfly enjoying the sun. Every year there is the miracle of 'repeat' which is not repeat at all but re-new. As you read this, possibly in isolation, *remember our future rests* in Christ.



Collect 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.