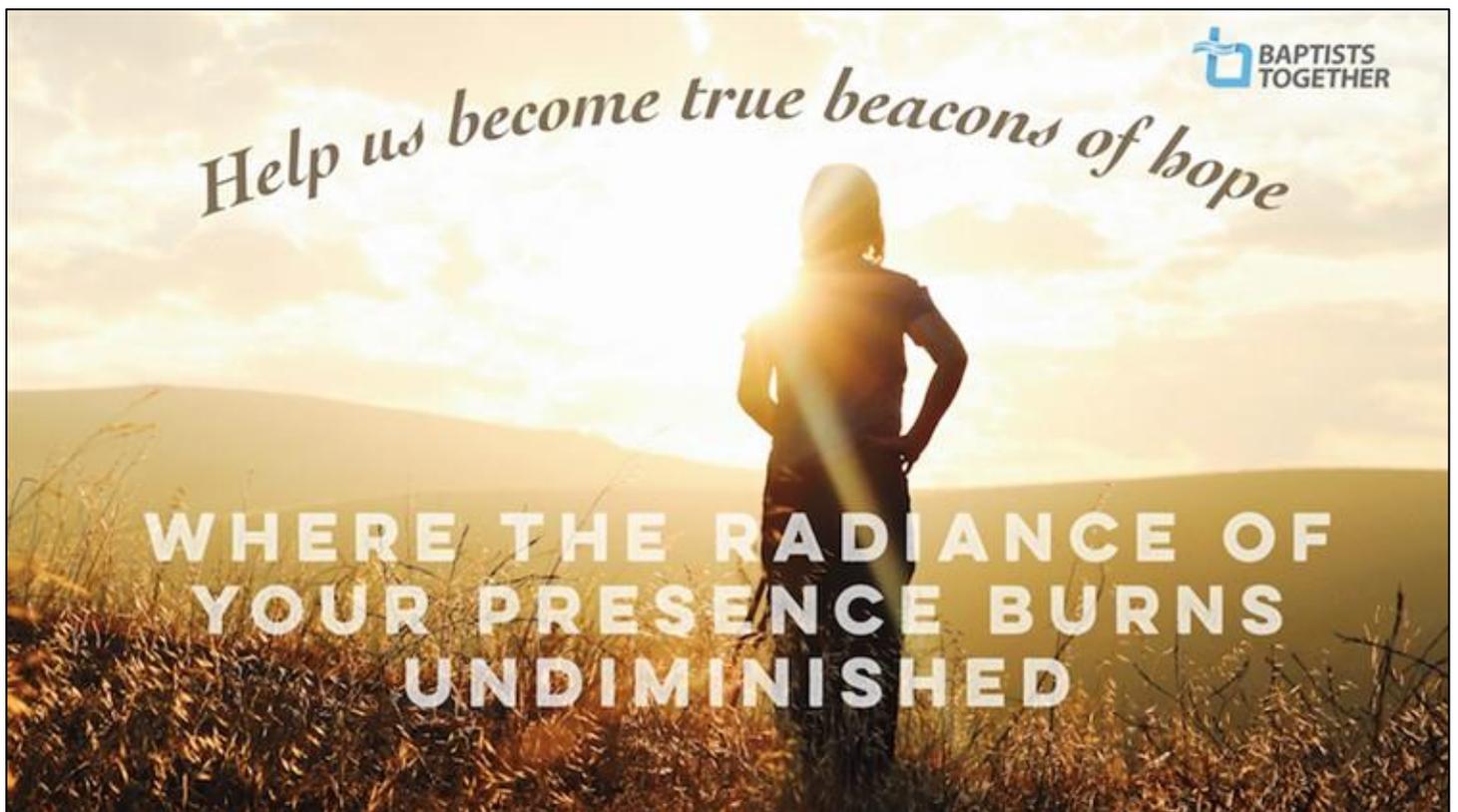


## Palm Sunday

A reflection written for Palm Sunday 2017 by Phil Jump, Regional Minister Team Leader for the North Western Baptist Association.



## **Palm Sunday - 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord' (Matthew 21:9)**

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem is a profound moment. He enters the temple in the throes of religious festival and then casts out the peddlers and merchants who have turned it into a commercial enterprise. Religion has become a way of earning an easy living – devotion has become an opportunity to inflate the prices of the necessary paraphernalia of ritual and tradition.

The Court of the Gentiles had been turned into a religious market place. The outer court, that for many would be the only part of the temple into which they were admitted, had ceased to be their place of prayer. God had been displaced in the name of religion; exploitation and opportunism had been clothed with respectability and expedience.

Jesus' response is dramatic and decisive, in a matter of moments tables are upturned, wares are sent flying and the entire scene is thrown into disarray. As our Lenten journey enters its final stage, we are reminded that the road to Calvary is not a place for easy religion.

What are the sounds that herald God's coming?  
Songs of praise and refrains of Hosanna?  
Or the clattering of upturned tables, jangling of scattered coins  
And the shouts and protests of angry traders?

For in the midst of this disrupted marketplace  
You call all people to reclaim the rhythms of prayerfulness  
Exposing the selfish opportunism  
That is falsely veiled in expediency and necessity

Preserve us from a faith, where we become the temple traders  
Laying out our stalls of religion and routine  
Crowding out the gateways to your presence with our own pre-occupations  
Leaving those who seek you outside of our cluttered sacred courts.

What public squares are we called to reclaim;  
As places where your word can once again resound?  
What tables are we called to over-turn;  
That have too readily become the seats of exploitation?

What facades of respectability are we called to strip away?  
What light might we shed on injustice?  
Whose empires are we called to topple,  
As the Redeemer's presence is again made known?

Help us become true Beacons of Hope;  
Where the radiance of your presence burns undiminished;  
Where thresholds of gracious welcome are clearly illumined;  
And the light of truth exposes evil's harmful endeavours.

## ***Palm Sunday drama***

[This drama can also be downloaded and listened to as a dramatic reading by clicking here](#)

*What kind of a day have I had? Don't even ask!*

*I mean it started out fine. Got down to the courtyard-market nice and early - beautiful morning! Clear blue skies and I got a brilliant pitch right by the temple gate. Got my stall set up in time for the early birds and it was all going fine.*

*Well you know what it's like - get enough stock shifted during festival season and your set up for the rest of the year. And there I was, minding my own business, doing a nice steady trade then suddenly there's this almighty commotion.*

*Didn't think much of it at first - well you know how some of these youngsters are - Passover always fires them up, then they start picking an argument with some Roman Guard and go and get themselves arrested.*

*"Keep your head down, Simeon" I says to myself - "you've got a family to look after, watch your stall and keep out of trouble"*

*Well I could hear this guy shouting from across the courtyard - assumed it was one of the Roman officers at first; barking out his orders, giving people what's what. But then I hear what he was saying.*

*"My Father's House - you've turned it into a den of thieves - built to be a place of prayer and you've turned it into bazaar.*

*Well that's not the sort of thing a Roman Officer is going to say. They couldn't care less what we do in the temple courts, so long as we cause no trouble. And then I saw him - Jesus of Nazareth they say his name is. And before I could even try to make him see reason, he just picks up my trading table and tips it onto the floor.*

*Well the lambs went running in one direction - the dove cages shattered on the cobbles and before I knew it my whole week's stock has just disappeared. It was all I could do to grab the takings - and half of them went rolling across the floor and got picked up by beggars.*

*And then he moved onto the next stall, then the next - shouting the same thing - you've turned my Father's House into a den of thieves. He even had a go at old Benjamin - I mean he's worked that pitch for as long as I can remember.*

*And then he was gone - off into the temple as bold as brass, and spent the day arguing with the priests and the Pharisees. I'm telling you, that guy is going to get himself into serious trouble; he's going to get us all into serious trouble if he carries on like that.*

*All we are doing is trying to make the best of things; trying to make a decent living and give the people a bit of a festival to take their minds off things. We don't want these idealists coming along and upsetting things. And what about me? What's a man going to feed his family with when his main trading stock has been sent flying across the cobbles?*

*House of prayer - house of prayer indeed. Lovely idea, but that's not going to put bread on the table.*

## **Prayer**

*Age old Psalms and familiar stanzas  
Crowds and choirs in common voice  
Stirring tunes and stunning anthems  
Palm leaves and banners, cheers and hosannas  
Declare that you are Lord and King.*

*It's a song that's so easy to join in with  
When everyone else is humming our tune  
When its words can thoughtlessly tumble from our lips  
And then our lives carry on unaffected by the affirmation  
That you are Lord and King*

*Squawking Birds and jangling coins  
Angry traders and startled customers  
Commotion and confusion  
Exasperated questions and fear of the consequences  
Declare that you are Lord and King*

*I lay out my stall and offer my wares  
Set about my business and do the things I do  
But the eyes of the Saviour meet mine  
And ask of me questions that words alone can never answer  
What does it mean to call me Lord and King?*

*God of all things  
Who came to us as Jesus  
Inviting us to pray together  
That your Kingdom may come  
Help us to embrace afresh the realities contained within that profound invitation.*

*We pray for those – who like the visitors to the temple  
Feel excluded and driven away  
By the interests and priorities that we pursue  
Forgive us for when we fit you into our world  
Rather than seeking to make you the centre of all we seek to do  
Help us in every aspect of our lives  
To live as those who truly declare  
That Jesus is King*

**AMEN**

## **Poem**

They lined the road, palm branches held high  
Reciting familiar words from well known Psalms  
Hosanna, Hosanna  
Hosanna in the Highest  
Blessed in He, who comes in the name of the Lord  
Word-perfect  
Well-rehearsed  
True to every line of the script.  
Playing their part  
In this human tableau  
That acted out their deepest hopes and longings.  
One day, maybe one day  
It would all be for real  
There would be a King  
God's King  
A liberator  
Saviour  
Messiah  
A true Son of David.  
Once again enthroned as King of the Jews.

But for now  
They must content themselves  
With the annual ritual  
Acting out the past  
Hoping for a future  
But living in the painful present.  
Words and actions that said everything  
Yet meant nothing

And through the crowd  
Came the man from Nazareth  
Riding on a Donkey

And those with eyes to see could see  
The king had finally come  
God, present with his people  
To be welcomed and proclaimed

And those with eyes to see could see  
The usurper had finally gone too far  
The rebel, present with his people  
To be crushed and put down

And those with eyes that could not see  
Waved and cheered the stranger into town  
Then put down their palm leaves  
Took up their cloaks  
And went away

To learn their lines  
For the next act  
Crucify Crucify.

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The Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) is changing its legal status from a charitable unincorporated association to a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO). From 1 January 2020, BUGB will operate as a CIO with registered charity number 1181392

October 2017