

*Sermon preached by Revd Ross Fishburn
St Paul's Canterbury
Palm Sunday
Sunday 10 April 2022*

I have set my face like flint.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me?

When the church remembers the servant songs of Isaiah at this time, we do so as a commentary on the journey of Jesus from palm to passion and beyond.

Here we have the great theme of this Passion Sunday of the Palms, and of this Holy Week that we enter today.

Jesus enters Jerusalem to meet his fate with his eyes open, ready to confront those who oppose him, steadfast in his purpose to witness to God's reign of mercy and wholeness. In the midst of the story of the hosannas, and the palms and the donkey this theme is there in the face of Jesus, set like flint, determined in his purpose. It is there in the trial as he witnesses to the reign of mercy and grace as he refuses to answer the questions of his accusers.

Who will contend with me? Who will confront me? The servant of the Lord asks in Isaiah. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty. All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up. For the Lord's servant knows that God is with him, and that is what matters most: The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near.

This is the theme at the heart of the week: the determination of Jesus in the face of all that opposes him, and his consistency to his message, in his preaching and his miracles, in his relationships and his table fellowship, the message of the grace and mercy of

God which reaches out to all who will allow themselves to be embraced by it.

The English priest and liturgist Jim Cotter sums this theme up in verse.

Stretched between earth and the heavens
we see a striving so awesome,
a strange and harrowing love
a bearing of pain between father and son
a loving right through to the end
through the worst of devil and death.

a loving right through to the end, through the worst of devil and death.

This is the central theme of this day and this week, as we journey from palm to passion and beyond.

It is the story of a boundless, utterly consistent love, poured out even to what the world thought would be the end as they sealed the broken body of Jesus in the tomb. The world and its powers thought it had made an end to this trouble-maker, this preacher of God's outrageous grace and mercy which disturbed the settled patterns of their power and influence. They had hoped that a cross would exhaust that love which was his motive force. But they didn't count on the assurance of Jesus, the Lord's servant, who knew more than anything else where the love he gave to others came from; he knew his vindicator was near; he knew that he would not be disgraced, because he was loved from the beginning of all things and before it by His Father, and would be held in that love until the end and beyond.

The centre of this week's story, this week's journey is the confrontation between love and hatred, between the world's darkness and the light of God's grace and mercy, between all that deals death and life abundant, which is shown to be triumphant

even in being poured out to the end. It is the story of *a loving right to the end, through the worst of devil and death.*

May your walk with the Lord of the Palm and the Passion give you life and hope and strength this week, and bring you to God's glory hereafter.