Palm Sunday Stowe 2025

“Rejoice greatly! Shout aloud! Behold your king is coming to you, righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey” Zech 9

Luke 22: 14-23

So heard that Jesus triumphantly entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and Jerusalem at that time was busy and full of pilgrims coming to visit the temple and celebrate the Passover. Historians estimate that the usual population of Jerusalem at that time was about 25,000 but for the Passover this number increased to over 200,000. For the Jews wanted to visit the temple of Solomon and celebrate the Passover meal, when they remembered Moses leading them out of Egypt and slavery. Traditionally a Passover lamb was killed in the afternoon in the temple courts and then roasted. Then it would be eaten at twilight on the Thursday, which the Jews saw as the start of the next day.

Jesus and his disciples were in the upper room and reclining at the table, it was the custom to sit around a table on the floor and recline whilst enjoying a meal, and poignantly Jesus shares this meal with his disciples, a Passover meal that we know as the last supper.

Jesus says ‘I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you’ or ‘I have desired this with all my heart’ – expressions of deep emotion. In some ways Jesus is saying goodbye to his close friends, for next day He will die on the cross. This meal marks the end of Jesus being on earth as their rabbi or teacher, everything is about to change. Also, Jesus knows what is to come, the suffering he must endure; and of course he wants to share this meal of friendship with those closest to him. But this is not the beginning of the end but the beginning of the beginning for Jesus came to die, to make this sacrifice and to institute a new covenant, FOR ALL OF US. This covenant is the promise of forgiveness and reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus as the way the truth and life, through repentance and through a heart open and focused on God.

And Jesus uses the meal to institute a sacrament which we know now as Holy Communion or the Eucharist. A sacrament is an ordinary thing which now has deeper significance because it represents something very special and important to those who do it. And that’s exactly what Jesus does, he takes the bread and wine, very ordinary everyday parts of the meal and tells his disciples to share bread and wine going forward to remember him and his sacrifice. The meal is no longer about the escape from Egypt, it is no longer commemorating the Passover, the meal becomes about Jesus himself. He takes the bread and says ‘this is my body given for you’ and he takes the wine and says ‘this is the blood of the new covenant shed for you’ These statements are so personal, they represent pain and suffering and ultimately sacrifice on Jesus’ part but it is all done for us. He is speaking to each one of us as individuals. Perhaps there is a danger that we say these words so often that the meaning of them is diluted slightly, but this so personal and spoken to the heart of each and every one of us. And Jesus wants us to continue doing this to remember and feel what he has done for us.

Significantly Jesus says that the wine is a new covenant, a special promise between God and his people and only God himself can create or institute a covenant, only divine Jesus by his human sacrifice could give creation this new covenant or promise. This is the fulfilment of Jeremiah’s wonderful prophecy; God says ‘ I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts, and I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more’ and because of this God promises ‘I will be their God and they shall be my people’ This is our hope and our salvation, the promise of forgiveness if we repent, which leads to a restored relationship with God ,the promise of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to guide us and the promise that the kingdom of God will come. God says we will belong with Him and He will always be with us. This is my security: that I belong to God and He will always be there for me.

The Passover meal commemorates the Jewish nation being freed from slavery with the sacrificed lamb representing the sin bearing animal sacrifice that allowed the Jewish households to escape God’s judgement long ago in Egypt. and Jesus’ himself is described by John in his Gospel as the sacrificial lamb of God who dies for the sins of the world. And in doing so Jesus gives us this new covenant promise and with it the hope of salvation, which we remember with this sacrament, the sharing of bread and wine which unites Christians everywhere, as we remember and give thanks for our new covenant of forgiveness and loving relationship with God.