

Sermon: St Andrew's Corbridge Trinity 18 2026

May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

It was good to read part of Psalm 118; it is the great Psalm of Easter Sunday, a Psalm of joy and celebration, of praise for the wonders of salvation. As Christians, we read it as a witness to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the final Psalm of a group called the Hallel or 'Praise Psalms', Psalms 113-118. They were sung at the great Jewish festivals including the Passover meal; Jesus and his disciples would have sung them at the Last Supper. The Psalm has no title, but it is set in Jerusalem and it seems to imply that the Psalmist is the King. If you read the whole Psalm, it reads like a great procession, led by the King and his entourage, perhaps from the royal palace to God's Temple in Jerusalem.

Earlier in the Psalm, the King tells of his experience. He has been grievously afflicted – he speaks of being hard pressed, of those who are his enemies, of being surrounded by a swarm of angry bees. These bees are the nations, Israel's foes, bent on destroying Jerusalem. Clearly, the city was in great peril – it was being pushed to the very brink.

And yet, there had been an amazing deliverance. The Psalm exults that the Lord had fought for his people because they trusted in him, they took refuge in him. The Lord's Name was their powerful defence, and the Lord's salvation was experienced. The King had been facing death, but out of death comes life.

And so, we come to the verses we read together. The great triumphant procession arrives at the gates of the Temple. These gates speak of God's *sedeq* - God's righteousness and faithfulness – to enter these gates is to experience salvation for God's presence is very near.

The King then makes an act of thanksgiving as he enters the gates – thanksgiving for answered prayer and for salvation or deliverance. Perhaps as the King looks up at the great arches of the Temple, he sees the great stones – and one particular stone. What had seemed to be a useless stone – thrown away by the builders had become the chief cornerstone – the key-stone, the stone on which every other stone depends.

If you look at the top of the Roman arch – there in the middle is the cap-stone or key-stone. It is the vital stone that keeps the arch in place and gives it strength. In the Psalm this stone could be a foundation stone or a key-stone. Whatever the case, once the King was useless, as good as dead, but now the Lord has chosen him to be the chief cornerstone. This is all God's doing and it's marvellous to behold.

And then the King prays for God to save his people: 'Come, O Lord and save us we pray.' 'Save us' in Hebrew is literally 'hosanna'. The word 'hosanna' is fascinating. It's a shout of joy and acclamation - a spiritual 'hooray' but it's also a plea for help – '*Save us, Lord. Send us prosperity*'. Even in deliverance, we must trust in and pray for God's saving grace.

Finally, the procession arrives before the great altar of sacrifice. The priests pronounce a blessing on this King 'who comes in the name of the Lord' and all who come with him. And finally, everyone joins in the great shout – again this seems to be part of the Temple liturgy – 'O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his loving mercy endures for ever.'

Now today's Gospel reading is very significant. Jesus spoke this parable just after entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, so it is five days before death on the cross. And what did the crowds shout out on Palm Sunday: 'Hosanna to the Son of David – Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' They were quoting Psalm 118. And hosanna was indeed a shout of praise and acclamation as with joy their hailed Jesus as King. But it is also a plea - 'Come, O Lord, save us, we pray.' The people needed not just a King, but a Saviour.

And so, with that memory of the crowds ringing in his ears, Jesus tells a parable. And he drew on Isaiah 5 – the first reading. Indeed, in the first verse of the Gospel reading he virtually quotes Isah 5. The landowner plants, a vineyard, dug a winepress and built a watchtower. What more could he do lovingly and carefully to prepare it? But what did that vineyard produce? – rotten grapes. Verse 7 of Isaiah 5 is damning – 'For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished garden. He expected justice but saw bloodshed, righteousness' – that word *sedeq* again, 'but heard a cry.' So Jesus develops the parable. The landowner having so lovingly built the vineyard went away and leased it to tenants, by which he means the Kings and priests and religious establishment.

He sent slaves to gather each harvest, symbolising the prophets, but they beat them, killed them, stoned them. So, the landowner said, 'I will send my son; surely they will respect him', but even the son they rejected and killed – we are 5 days before the cross. So, the parable continues = these tenants will be severely judged and the vineyard will be given to other tenants who will produce good grapes not rotten grapes. And then Jesus quotes Psalm 118 – *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes.* Now Matthew's Gospel was written about AD75-80; it was a Jewish Christian community but also included gentiles- because God's vineyard is now Jews and Gentiles who follow Jesus. But the remarkable thing is that Jesus quotes Psalm 118 as referring to himself. He is the rejected stone who is the cornerstone.

No wonder the Church reads Psalm 118 as a royal Psalm of Jesus. He is the King who gave himself up to the swarm of angry bees; who was thrust to the brink, even to death itself, but who was raised up by the majesty and all-powerful right hand of God. He is the stone rejected by the builders – and that text is also quoted in Mark 12 and Matthew 21 and Luke 20, Acts 4, and 1 Peter 2, who has become the chief cornerstone. He is the one who comes to us in the name of the Lord in word and sacrament. He is the Saviour who died on the cross for our sins. He is the one to whom today we cry out:

O give thanks to the Lord for he is good.
Yes, his loving-mercy is for ever.

And his desire is that we are his people, his vineyard, should be fruitful in his service as once again we bring to him our worship and praise. Today we gladly offer to him our lives once again. Christ is our corner-stone.