

# Palm Sunday Sermon

Extract from a sermon given by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams,  
at the Cathedral Church of St George the Martyr, Jerusalem. Sunday 13th April 2003

At the beginning of Holy Week, we stand with Jesus before the gates of a city. We know that once we have entered we shall be swept up in events that we cannot control and that will bring us to the very edge of what we can bear, as we walk with him to Calvary and the tomb. This week tells us that God is able to change everything about us – our fear, our sin, our guilt, our untruthfulness. But to receive that change in the actual circumstances of our lives asks of all of us such a revolution in our hearts that we are stunned and frightened at the thought. 'In his death is my birth, in his life is my life', as the song says; but the new birth is for us a kind of dying too. Remember this morning's epistle: 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus'.

As believers and as human beings, we stand at the gates of the city – a 'city of wrong' as one great Muslim writer called it in the title of his fictional meditations on the last week of the Lord's life; a city where so many sufferers are silenced and where so many innocent on both sides of the terrible conflict are killed and their deaths hidden under a cloak of angry, selfish, posturing words, whatever language they are spoken in. We know that in this city, trying to live by faith, hope and love leaves us looking pretty helpless. And we also know in our hearts that so much of what fuels the violence is in ourselves too: the passionate longing never to be a victim again, the hunger for security expressed in the ownership of the land, the impotent near-mindless fury that bursts out in literally suicidal ways, and brings destruction to so many. We know the urge to defend what can't be defended because we can't lose face; the urge to make a dramatic gesture that destroys the future because we need to feel that we can do something. We too are citizens of this city of wrong.

Jesus does not steer us away from the gates and send us back into the holy silence of the desert or the peace of the countryside. He keeps us close to him as we stand at the gates, and he tells us that these are also the gates of heaven. **If you recognise your involvement and prepare to walk with Jesus into the city, to the cross and the tomb, there is a joy and a mystery at the end of the path, because it is inexhaustible divine love that walks with us.** We stand not just at the gates of the city of wrong, the great city where the Lord was crucified, as revelation says, but also at the entrance to the Garden of Eden.

At these city gates, we see the possibilities. We can enter with Jesus and walk with him to his garden of new life. Or we can enter and find ourselves caught up in the murderous crowds, and, at the end of it all, find ourselves with hands both empty and bloodstained. Or we can stay at the gates, unwilling to commit ourselves because we know that as soon as we enter there will be trial and suffering; but if we stay there, we shall never reach the garden. How much do we want to be there, where God walks with us again in the cool of the day? The gates are open. Let us with Jesus prepare to go through, to walk with him to his cross and his resurrection.