**The holy Gospel according to John 12: 20-33  
20**Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. **21**They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” **22**Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

**23**Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24**Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. **25**Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26**Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

**27**“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **28**Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” **29**The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

**30**Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. **31**Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. **32**And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” **33**He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.  
This passage from John is a common Gospel reading for Lent. Very traditional, but the story actually takes place after Palm Sunday in the period leading up to his crucifixion on Good Friday and resurrection on Sunday.

But it is Palm Sunday next week, followed by Easter. So, to squeeze this story into the Lenten programme, the Lectionary inserted the reading into this week. They have put the cart before the horse! Consequently, if this reading is going to make any sense, I would like to recap on Palm Sunday to show you how this story fits into what we now call Holy Week.

The crowd that had come for the Passover festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. The Palm Sunday service next week is based on the account of Jesus’ triumphant entry to Jerusalem on a donkey. The festival crowd had heard so much about him, igniting their imaginations and hopes for the coming of God’s messianic kingdom. They thought, perhaps this was the promised messiah, the King of Israel. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!” (a Hebrew word meaning “save!) “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!” Can you remember the parades in Queen St for the America’s Cup and the World Rugby Cup? On reading this account, one can imagine it would have generated this level of excitement. These were extraordinary events where the communications network went down because there were too many mobiles in the one area.

What you have here in Jerusalem is also an extraordinary event where the issue that arose at the time was that they were hailing him as their king and the Jewish leaders or Pharisees were disturbed. Was he a potential nationalist leader with whose help Judea might be able to become wholly independent of foreign powers? They knew that the people were eager to have their own king, with a complete independence from Rome. We can understand their motivation, because the Roman occupation force had to be financed by the local population, and the taxes must have been crippling.

However, notwithstanding the local wine makers whose businesses might be threatened by the hearsay extraordinary talents of this young man, the occupying Romans would never allow anyone to be king over Israel without their permission, and the Jewish authorities perceived that this parade for Jesus could be viewed as an implied disloyalty to Rome. Well, it was actually, and the Pharisees might well have been justified in thinking that his popularity could lead to an uprising among the Passover crowds. They knew very well how Rome traditionally responded to populist uprisings, frightening!

After witnessing the wonders of Jesus’ miracles, there were indeed many believers, but as the week progressed, the mounting opposition of the Jewish authorities to Jesus was made perfectly clear to all.

Hence it became a bit awkward for people to recognise him as the promised messiah because of the threatening risk of excommunication by the community. There was always that constant fear of excommunication, and naturally the people had a desire to be respected by their fellow people. It is called peer pressure.

It did not help the Pharisees’ advanced state of paranoia when the two Greeks from outside the nation came and wanted to see Jesus. After three years of work and public ministry, Jesus’ popularity really seemed to be incrementing at an alarming rate, in fact an exponential rate. It did not help matters when the two Greeks, who were actually Jews, but nevertheless outsiders – came to the disciples and asked to see Jesus.

News had travelled quickly, and the word had spread about this man who had cleansed the temple, turned water into wine, healed many people, fed the five thousand, given sight to the blind, raised Lazarus from the dead, the list goes on.

So, the Greeks wanted to see Jesus, who was by now a legend, but on a cautious note, instead of rushing up to Jesus and accosting him without a proper introduction, they opted for a sense of reservation and containment by approaching Philip.

The only disciples to have Greek names were Phillip, which means in Greek, lover of horses, and Andrew, derived from the Greek word meaning courage.

Excited by this approach, Philip and Andrew came before Jesus, to tell him the exciting news.

Jesus responded with an unsettling proclamation designed to break down the barriers of religious exclusivity in Judea. His response was to talk about how if a grain of wheat is to bear any fruit, it must first die. To his disciples the grain of wheat story seemed and rather morbid, but it was in fact a prediction for his death and resurrection. You could almost imagine the disciples’ frustration with such a cryptic message.

The initiative to include people from outside Judea who had come to join the Passover festival, meant that this widening recognition of Jesus had potential benefits to all and there was much to encourage everybody in the full participation within Christ’s fold.

The crowd that was there had heard the voice thundered from heaven, as if an angel had spoken to him personally. But Jesus was to say, this voice was for our benefit, not his.  The ensuing resurrection will be a wonderful beginning, to live of our lives with thanksgiving for all the ways we have been graced with a life of love, which surrounds us on every side.

As Christians, we are all blessed with a life where despair can be overcome with hope, weakness is swallowed up in a growing strength, and the temptation to hate is surrounded and finally conquered with love.

As we work through this period of Lent, there will of course be a temptation to brush over the sad bits and anticipate the exciting day of resurrection. Well, his death was the gateway to this new life. Death is not always physical. For us there can be deaths in relationships, marriages, hopes, dreams, health, and beliefs. In such circumstances we can learn from his example and resurrect ourselves. We just pick ourselves up and carry on. In fact, this is our theme for lent this year. We leave the bad stuff behind and move on.

On Good Friday, at this church, there will be no laughs, no morning tea, we just walk out quietly and go home to think about his suffering and the iniquity of his treatment. But do not despair, on Easter Sunday we will return to leave the bad stuff from Friday behind and celebrate a joyous day when Christ is risen.

Christ has set a path in life for all of us all to follow. His life, his love, his morals and his inspirations are a wonderful example to us all. It is ours to share.   
Amen