

Reflection for Palm Sunday April 2020 on Zoom

Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem features a community on the move and a city in turmoil. The Jews are getting ready for the Passover feast and their country is occupied by tyrannical Romans. As we look around us today, we see not just a city, but a whole world in turmoil – occupied by a virus? - and a community, not on the move, but stuck at home!

In these circumstances, it's hard to imagine the enthusiastic welcome Jesus receives. But did the claps and cheers for NHS workers perhaps reflect something similar? Do the many skilled people returning to jobs in the NHS give us another image of similar enthusiasm? And let's not forget the many others who are keeping essential services running in these challenging times. Those who work in food shops, those supporting isolated and housebound people, delivering the mail, keeping the electricity flowing and the broadband functioning, collecting our rubbish, driving trains and buses so essential workers can get to work. Those keeping children of key workers safe in nurseries and schools, and those working with the older and vulnerable in care homes. And more...

Not long after Jesus and his friends enter the city, comes a momentous week – leading to their last meal together, Jesus' arrest, his trial and crucifixion. The disciples become fearful. Yet in this fear, someone lends them a room for the Last Supper.

What importance has this Gospel for us? The palm branches, the donkey, the processions mark a day of celebration, but the week that follows is anything but. We find dark deeds and the negativity of deceit and sin, when those who should know better turn bad, when loyalties are tested and justice is muddled up, and an innocent man is executed! Is there a hint of this on this Sunday? Not really, so let's stay with the Jerusalemites welcoming Jesus and hear in their shouts and cries a message to take with us into this Holy Week.

What do we take from this familiar story? We see Jesus' courage, stoicism and steadfastness. He's aware of the hostility and danger but doesn't go into hiding. Instead he makes a public declaration by this entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. He's challenging the authorities. It's a bold act. Yet he's not foolish. When he sent for the donkey a password is used – the Lord needs them. The donkey was considered a noble beast and was sometimes a king's choice when he rode into a city in peace. Perhaps the password for today is still the Lord needs them. In this case it's us. He needs our courage, stoicism and steadfastness. To be faithful even when life is hard.

So, in his entry into Jerusalem we see Jesus' claim. This is the entrance of a King and of the Messiah. Jesus is the Christ, the one who comes in the name, power, and presence of God. The Hebrew root of the word Hosanna means 'save us now' and is a cry for help. It's a call for deliverance to a Saviour and King.

As we approach Holy Week in this very strange time, we too need the word – hosanna – save us now. Perhaps more than ever before we need our Saviour. So, remember Jesus enters Jerusalem for us. We're not just spectators at an event that happened a long time ago – we tell this story every year because it's our story. It's the ongoing story of God's love for us through his Son. The story of our Saviour, who was born, as the writer to the Philippians says, in human likeness, and so understands our humanity. As we move through Holy Week we will read of his humanity. Of his fear and despair, isolation and loneliness, vulnerability and helplessness, and we can take courage and comfort from the one who never departed from the path he was on but gave his life for us. The one who is with us, always to the end of time.

Hosanna!