

Sunday 5th April 2020, Palm Sunday

For those who like to SING: Be Still For the Presence of the Lord

(If you can get on the internet you could get the words for songs, or just “lah, lah, lah if you don’t remember bits!!)

Prayer of confession and receive the forgiveness of God you don’t need fancy words, just tell God what you are sorry for, what you need help with. Know you are loved and forgiven. Read Psalm 51 if you get a bit stuck for words?

SING: Make Way, make way for Christ the King

Hallelu, hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah, praise you the Lord (stand up, sit down, this can be exercise!!)

Say thank you to God in prayer, this is thanksgiving

READING: Matthew 21: 1 – 17

Talk/Reflection Have you ever ordered or bought something and then found that it wasn’t really what you wanted, not what you thought it would be? (We had good knives from a company so we bought frying pans from them and they were rubbish – cost too much to return so we kept them. Never bought from that firm again!)

Jesus, God’s Christ, was the Messiah that the nation was waiting for – but he wasn’t what they had expected and so many of them rejected him, wanted to send him back and get a better one! **He wasn’t what they’d ordered!**

As they approached Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of the disciples into a village to go and get a donkey. This had clearly been pre-arranged, tell the owner that the Lord has need of them and it’ll be fine!! It wasn’t like sending a Scouser to rob a donkey!! The thing about the donkey wasn’t some minor issue about transport, there were Biblical and theological issues that made a donkey very significant at that moment:-

- 1) It had to be a donkey to fulfil the ancient prophecy, the promise of God in Zechariah 9:9 *“Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion, shout daughter of Jerusalem, see your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, humble and riding on a donkey, the foal of a donkey.* The events that would follow in the week ahead would shake people’s faith. They needed to be able to look back and say “This is just as God had said from ancient times, this is the Christ, the Son of God”
- 2) It had to be a donkey because Jesus was being welcomed INTO Jerusalem as King. When King David had left Jerusalem, David had left by the same route, over the Mount of Olives. Jesus, a King in the line of David, was using the same route to return to Jerusalem. King David had left in a hurry, in mourning, in danger. His son had betrayed him and his life was in danger and so he had escaped. There had been other kings but none anointed by God as King David was. As one king had ridden out of Jerusalem on a donkey, another was about to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. These people knew their history, the symbolism would not have been wasted on them

- 3) It had to be a donkey because a donkey symbolised peace and said something important about the mission and message of Jesus. There were people who were waiting for a Saviour who would come and rescue them from Roman occupation. They didn't have it too bad under the Romans, they had to pay taxes (death and taxes eh!) but nobody stopped them from going to work, or stole their land, or built a big wall around them. They still wanted an end to the indignity of being an occupied nation though so they were looking for a king who would come as a soldier and chuck out the Romans and set them free. But Jesus didn't come on a warhorse. He came on a donkey. **Hmmm! Jesus was a Saviour but not the one they had ordered!**

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem his disciples and the crowd that gathered covered the dusty road with their cloaks and with palm branches. This was a sign of honour, it was like getting out the red carpet when royalty comes – to stop the dust stirring up and getting this honoured person grubby! If we read 1 Kings 9 we'll find that when Elisha anointed Jehu as King, the people covered the dusty ground with their cloaks as they welcomed their newly anointed King. Jesus had been anointed in Bethany and here the crowd spread their cloaks and cut palm branches to give Jesus the “red carpet treatment”.

People were asking what was going on, who is this? In John's Gospel it says that a lot of the crowd had been there when Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and they were all speaking openly about Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth.

“Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna in the highest”. Jesus was being welcomed as king, as Messiah, **just not the one they'd ordered!**

Arriving in Jerusalem Jesus went first to the Temple where, in a really rather violent episode he began to grab the tables of the money changers and tables of the people who sold the temple sacrifices and he threw them about, overturning the tables.

The Jewish ritual Law said that people had to be pure and holy in order to make a sacrifice to God. The sacrifice had to be perfect and without blemish or else it was not good enough for God. Gradually, over time, it was decided that that the Temple officials had to say whether or not a sacrifice was considered pure enough and so you ended up only being able to buy your sacrifice in the Temple, where no doubt the Temple officials got a cut of the prophets. Once in the Temple, regular money could be considered sinful and so they developed Temple currency and you had to change your own money for Temple currency (with the Temple officials taking a cut off the profits made from exchange rates) and then you had to buy your certified sacrifice with the Temple money (with the Temple officials taking a cut of the profits) THIS is what Jesus was driving out, the exploitation of those who would draw near to God in repentance and faith.

Theologically Jesus was doing something really significant. He wasn't just standing up for justice for the poor, even though this is really important. Jesus had come to Jerusalem to go the Cross to die so that we could be reconciled with God. As Jesus was driving the traders out of the Temple He knew that within a week the whole system of Temple sacrifice itself would be overturned because HE, the spotless Lamb of God, would be taking away the sin of the world. This violent protest against the exploitation of worshippers was a call for justice, it was also an announcement that His once and for all sacrifice on the Cross was about to overturn the whole, old way of approaching God. Jesus, **God's Messiah, just not the one they'd ordered**

And then Jesus caused outrage. There he is in the Temple. He's upset all the tables of the moneychangers and the tradesmen and the Temple officials. Bad enough? Ah, he hasn't finished!! Jesus, it says in Matthew 21:14, invited blind people and lame people come to him in the Temple and he healed them. So? So, according to Jewish Law, disabled people were not allowed in the Temple. I kid you not, people with disabilities were considered impure, afflicted by God and were not therefore allowed into the Holy Temple of God.

Remember when Jesus healed a man born blind once and he was asked "Who sinned, the man or his parents?" Disability was considered to be a result of sin!

I used to work at Spring Common Special School, one of our students with Downs' Syndrome was chatting one day and told me that he had an extra chromosome, one more than me. I said "Hm, I read that" and he said "What if I'm normal and there's something wrong with all you people who haven't got an extra chromosome" and from that day on I have wondered if he might be right you know. Who says what's normal? Who says that this child wasn't a prophet?

Jesus said "OK everyone, outcast or otherwise, come in, come to me, be healed" and even the children were praising God and calling "Hosanna to the son of David". Jesus, God's Messiah, welcomed and received by many, but with a whole bunch of people **who simply wanted to send him back because he wasn't what they'd ordered!**

Then Jesus left Jerusalem and went to Bethany. What/who was at Bethany? His best friends, Lazarus, newly raised from death, his disciples Martha and Mary, his friends, his place of refuge. Are you missing your friends in this "lockdown"? Is loneliness setting in? We couldn't have had this crowded welcome for Jesus if this coronavirus had been around then. Churches are closed for the time being. Did we want a God who would blast coronavirus out of the earth? And here we have Emmanuel, God who is with us, within us, around us, beside us.

These strange times can give us an opportunity to welcome Jesus into our homes in a new and different way. The reason I've put songs here is because they mean a lot to so many people. Can we worship God at home, possibly with no other believers around us? I think so. We'll be reading the online sermons at different times but we will share the same readings and songs, the same "message" and we reach out in prayer to the same God. Jesus is Lord.

SING: What a Friend We Have In Jesus

Prayers for others (intercession) and say the Lord's Prayer

SING: Ride On, Ride on in Majesty

Pray the Grace