
Sunday 28th March – Palm Sunday
Readings: Psalm 118:19-end & Mark 11:1-11

Psalm 118:19-end

Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.
I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.
The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the LORD has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes.
The LORD has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.
LORD, save us!
LORD, grant us success!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.
The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.
You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.
Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

Mark 11:1-11

Jesus comes to Jerusalem as king

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village

ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly."

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

'Hosanna!'

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!'

'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Reflection

The passage in the Gospel of Mark begins on the Sunday before the Jewish Passover and the crucifixion of Jesus. Today we call it Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week. Perhaps the most significant week in human history?

Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the Roman world to celebrate the Passover, and the great escape from Egypt centuries before. At this time the population of the Jewish capital would swell from around 50,000 to well over 200,000.

Because of the crowds and the possibility of political unrest the occupying Romans sent additional soldiers to the city to quell any rebellion. The Roman soldiers came from the west, at the same time Jesus was travelling from the east.

When Jesus and his disciples got to the towns of Bethpage and Bethany, just a few miles from Jerusalem, he sent two of his disciples on ahead saying:

"You will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'What are you doing?' just say, 'The Lord needs it and will return it soon.'

The two disciples found the colt. As they were untying it, some bystanders demanded, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' They said what Jesus had told them to say, and they were permitted to take it." (Mark 11:2-6).

They brought the donkey to Jesus, threw their garments over it, and he sat on it. Some spread their cloaks on the floor while others laid leafy branches cut from nearby fields. The crowds were treating Jesus as royalty. The strewn cloaks were like rolling out the red carpet!

The crowd began to call out: *'Hosanna! 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!' 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'* (Mark 11:9-10).

'Hosanna' literally means 'save us' but in common usage became a shout of 'Praise God'.

All this fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy:

"Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey - riding on a donkey's colt." Zachariah 9:9.

It would have been easy for Jesus to arrive inconspicuously. But he chose another way. He comes to Jerusalem not like the might of the Roman army, but riding on a donkey! He incites not fear, but cheering crowds!

On Palm Sunday Jesus was treated like royalty with the crowd shouting 'Hosanna!' By Friday the crowd would be shouting 'Crucify him!' But was it the same crowd? Were they fickle and easily swayed? Or was it a different crowd?

There were two different crowds!

The Sunday crowd were composed of Jesus' disciples, pilgrims from Galilee and ordinary people from Jerusalem. The Friday crowd was composed of people under the influence of the religious leaders.

The image of Jesus riding on a donkey is powerful. The King of all Kings astride a lowly animal! His humility challenges us. So does scripture...

"Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love." Ephesians 4:2.

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves." Philippians 2:3.

"So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." James 4:7.

~ Peter Sanderson ~