

*A sermon preached by Emma Hodge  
at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Sandhurst  
on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2017.*

*May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.*

Palm Sunday, is one of those days where the readings set for the day are well known, it is the account of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilling Old Testament prophecies and as an indication that he is king, but not an earthly king. All four gospels include this account and while there are minor variations, the story is pretty consistent. It can then be hard to engage afresh with the reading each year, especially as we all lead busy lives and today can be overshadowed by Easter. So let's start by taking some time to look at the story closely.

I want to start by asking you to imagine that you are Jew, and are in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, you are living under Roman Rule and are preparing for an important Jewish festival, the Passover.

Jerusalem is crowded and you are looking forward to seeing friends and family who you have not seen for a long time but, have made the journey to Jerusalem. The air is tense with excitement and is already noisy. Over this you see people tearing palm branches down and going out to meet someone in the distance. You see a crowd gathering around someone with palm branches, and some people are putting their cloaks on the ground, you hear the shouts

***Hosanna!***

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

Which start off in the distance but are repeated and become louder as they come towards you. You know that these words are verses from Psalm 118, one of the psalms sung at the Passover, but you wonder why these words are being shouted. You see someone on a donkey which, knowing the scriptures, is a sign of Zechariah's prophecy being fulfilled about the promised messiah.

You start feeling hopeful, **is** this person coming to fulfil the prophecies you have heard in the scriptures? Is this the person who will be a new king of the Jews and set you free from Roman oppression? Is Zechariah's prophecy going to be fulfilled<sup>1</sup> as he prophesied that your king would come in triumphantly riding on a donkey or is this similar to the Maccabean

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<sup>1</sup> Zec 9:9

revolt<sup>2</sup> of almost 200 years earlier which is commemorated at Hanukkah, another Jewish Festival that occurs in the winter?

You look around to see how the Jewish Authorities and Roman soldiers are reacting to this? You don't want to risk your safety and those near you, they don't seem to be taking any undue interest so you, along with the people around you join in with the shouts

**Hosanna!**

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

**Blessed is the king of Israel!**

As we have the benefit of hindsight, we know that the person on the donkey is Jesus, who by his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday fulfils the Old Testament prophecies and show that he is king, but not an earthly king. It is on Palm Sunday that Jesus shows us that he is the messiah.

I would now like to look in more detail at a couple of items from the reading, firstly the Passover. The Passover is a Jewish festival which celebrates the Lord rescuing the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt and especially the last plague which the Lord inflicted on the pharaoh and Egyptian people, which was the death of the first born; the Jews had placed a mark of lamb's blood on their door posts so they were spared from losing the first born in their households. It was only when Pharaoh suffered the loss of his first born son that he agreed to let Moses lead the people out of Egypt.

During the Jewish festival of Passover (which starts tomorrow this year), one of the themes is being saved and the freedom that goes with it, this is remembered in thanksgiving to God. Jews remember that God saved them and sent Moses to lead them out of the slavery in Egypt, various aspects of this story is remembered in different ways, one way is that different psalms are said or sung during the festival, one of them is Psalm 118.

The exclamations which the crowd shout when they see Jesus comes from this psalm, one of these exclamations is "Hosanna". Hosanna is actually two Hebrew words, **hoshiyah na** which literally means save please. The verse in Psalm 118 is translated in our version as "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord"

The Passover is about remembering the fact that Jews were saved by God and led out of slavery. When people shouted "Hosanna" as Jesus came into Jerusalem, they were

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<sup>2</sup> Maccabean revolt BC167 (see 1 Maccabees 13:51 and 2 Maccabees 10:7) ref Hanukkah

pleading to be saved, but they got it wrong, they were asking to be saved from the Roman rule, however, this is not what Jesus came to do. Jesus does not save us from oppression from earthly rulers, instead he saves us in a very different way.

Jesus saves everyone who believes,

Jesus saves us through his death and resurrection.

Jesus frees us, not from oppressive rulers and regimes, but from our sin.

The way that Jesus saves us is through the cross.

It is through Jesus' death and resurrection that we are set free, free from the burden of our sin, those things which we do intentionally and unintentionally that causes us distance from God.

This is one of the important themes of today, the fact that Jesus, by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, came to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies, to show everyone that he was the messiah and that he was coming as a king to save his people. Later this week we will recall, among other events, Jesus' crucifixion which is a critical aspect in Jesus saving us and then his resurrection where he shows that he is alive and in that we are saved.

It is for these reasons, we share the hope that the people on the first Palm Sunday probably experienced when they saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem. We have the hope that through Jesus, provided we believe and follow him, we are saved.

As we come to the altar today let us offer a moment of thankfulness to God for the fact that we are free, not free to disobey God, but free from the burden of our sins which we are sorry for.

***As we sit, let us pray***

***Lord, we give you thanks that by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free. We rejoice that you are the saviour of the world.***