

Sermon by Rev Jane Kraft at St Michael's Sandhurst, Palm Sunday 28.03.2021

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, the most solemn week in the Christian year. Today we began the service by remember Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem but as the liturgy progresses the focus changes and we turn towards Christ's passion as we begin Holy Week.

Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem, on the surface, presents as an act of praise to Christ who reigns and anticipates the forthcoming triumph on the cross. The liturgical colour for the day is Red, the colour used for the Feast of Christ the King.

All four Gospels record this very public journey, but the synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke) give us more detail and there are a number of significant and symbolic elements which would have resonated with their readers.

The narrative begins with the procurement of a donkey.

At that time donkeys were the accepted mode of transport for rich and poor alike. The significance here is that Military Leaders rode on horses while messengers of peace rode donkeys.

Thus, Jesus is revealed as the peaceful Messiah bringing in his father's kingdom.

In the story we hear that the crowd placed their clothing on the donkey's back and strew their cloaks on the road, a bit like the red carpet rolled out for dignitaries of today, ruling monarchs and "Hollywood Royalty" alike.

The people were looking for the Messiah who would conquer Israel's enemies, and vanquish the occupying forces, the shouts of Hosannah were not so much acclamations of praise but cries of "save now" a cry which

had been used by Hebrews throughout Old Testament times as they sought help and protection.

The chants of the crowd also reveal Jesus' identity as Son of David and we are reminded that he was born in Bethlehem the City of Great King David, of the Davidic line. It is the title used by blind Bartimaeus when he too shouted out for help as Jesus passed by "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Mark 10 v 46-52

Who Jesus really is reinforced by the words, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord".

The actual words come from Psalm 118 which is a Psalm of thanksgiving for annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. And it was used as a regular greeting for pilgrims arriving at the Temple.

But there is a subtle nuance in this phrase because "He who comes" is the name for the Messiah. The Jews spoke of "the one who is coming" but, they looked for the Messiah who would vanquish and overcome Israel's enemies.

Jesus came as King of love and prince of peace.

If we look closer at the story, we see something else. We are told that this particular donkey was a colt, an animal unused and unsullied, the sort of animal which was fitting to be used for a sacred purpose.

A Donkey was able to carry heavy burdens far beyond what you would expect of an animal of that size. This humble beast of burden carried the Prince of Peace on his way to Calvary where He would bare our griefs and carry our sorrows". Isaiah 53 It displays, to those who would see that Jesus is, Lord of His own destiny, the one who would willingly bare the weight of the sin of all humankind.

But there is another aspect to this narrative.

Over the last year we have been forced into isolation, our ways of communication have changed, and our interaction with other human beings has been severely restricted. This has in many ways affected our interdependency and has encouraged self-containment.

But it has also engendered huge generosity. People have shared, resources, online shopping orders, the products of baking and many other things.

Generosity and sharing are important components of any loving, caring relationship.

We encounter generosity and mutual involvement in the Palm Sunday story too.

The loan of the donkey, the crowds sacrificing their clothing and the combined acclamation and common emotion they shared as they made their way along the road together.

The service this morning contains a pivotal moment in our observance of Lent as we move from the penitential wilderness, to the joy of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and so into Holy Week when we are reminded that the kingly power of Christ is the power of self - giving love.

This love calls us to walk with Him through the events of the last week of His earthly life, to Calvary, and to come to the foot of the cross and bring our doubts and fears, our despair and our grief, our failure and our wrongdoing and lay them at His feet.

Our active participation is an indication of our readiness to take up our cross and follow our Lord as we go with him to the place of suffering and death.

As we do so we hold out our empty hands and offer our sinful hearts for forgiveness, our fears, and our sickness for healing. Not just as we draw closer to Good Friday but each and every day.

Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to thy cross I cling.
Naked come to Thee for dress
Helpless look to thee for grace
Foul I to the fountain fly
Wash me Saviour or I die.