

Devotional Blog

Sunday 5th April: Palm Sunday

But where's my Palm Cross? Yes, Sunday 5th April is Palm Sunday, it is the start of Holy Week. Now, for most of us, a very odd Holy Week, as we live different lives to what only a few weeks ago we would call normal. We may well be missing our Palm Crosses, along with School, Workplace, Church, Sport, the Pub and meeting friends and family. We know the Palm Sunday story very well, it's in all the Gospels. Today we are especially thinking of the report of the event in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 21:1-11). Let's remind ourselves of its setting. Jesus had travelled uphill from Jericho on that famously dangerous road to the Passover in Jerusalem. The place would have been ram-packed, every male adult Jew within twenty miles was required to attend, alongside thousands of Jewish visitors from the known world. It was not a sudden decision by Jesus to make the trip, he had done his preparation and planning in several different ways. He sends a couple of disciples into a village, probably Bethany the home of very close friends. The disciples are to pick up a donkey, and according to Matthew's Gospel the donkey's foal. If challenged the disciples are to use the password "The Master needs them". Once the donkey was obtained, they were all set for this noisy piece of street theatre. The Old Testament Prophets were very well known for this type of performance art, acting out their message to drive the point home. Isaiah once walked about naked to get over the warning of impending danger, but let's not dwell on that today!

Symbolism is everywhere in the Palm Sunday story. The crowd lay their cloaks in front of Jesus. Given that they probably only had the one cloak, unlike Sir Walter Raleigh, the action emphasises the importance of Jesus' entrance to the city. The people shout

“Hosanna!”. This is a funny word, which can mean “save us”, and is a kind of quotation from Psalm 118: v 25. However, the word may simply have been used as a cry of acclamation like “hail” or “hurrah”. Jesus rides on the donkey, and according to John’s Gospel the crowd break off palm branches turning them into instant banners. The people get the message. Two images would have flooded into their minds. The first, would be the teaching of the Old Testament Prophet Zechariah (9:9-10), which they had learnt as children, and the second, was recalling the image of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem by Simon Maccabaeus when he defeated the occupying Greeks and cleansed the desecrated Temple. This was “in your face” communication, it’s mega clear: This man is our Saviour!

Sadly, most of the crowd were aching for a different sort of Saviour; a great prophet like Moses; a priest to lead the nation like Aaron; a warrior king like David or maybe a mixture of all these. It’s not difficult to see why the people got Jesus wrong. He enters Jerusalem as a King, but not to establish an earthly monarchy; but to bring peace, love and salvation. Just as he cleanses the Temple, not simply to restore institutional and ethical integrity of the priestly order but to announce that HE is the Priest who will offer the final sacrifice that will make open and permanent the access of all humanity to God.

In among all the symbolism of the event there’s a powerful message for us today. You remember the password that Jesus gave “The Master needs you”, let’s take that to also mean each of us. Jesus needs us! Our Lord and King, who defeated death, wants to be in your heart. He wants to share the good, the bad, the sad and the mad things of your life. This week could well be a tough week for you. Whatever you are doing: be it as a front line worker; or dealing with an illness of someone close or even yourself; helping a neighbour get their shopping or simply doing the vital job of “staying and praying”, Jesus needs you to be his hands, his feet, his voice. Through the words of the Gospel of that colourful, boisterous street

scene, the Master calls us. No doubt Jesus could see pass the adulation of the crowd, to the cross and his resurrection. Akin to Jesus, we also look beyond our compelling immediate situation. We will travel forward, doing his work, empowered by the Holy Spirit because THE MASTER NEEDS US! Hosanna!

Mark Gilks

Hampton Mission Partnership