

Palm Sunday – Passion Week 24 March 2024 – Lynda Whitwell

Palm Sunday: Mark 11:1 – 11 Passion: **Isaiah 50:4 – 9a, Phil 2:5 – 11, Mark 14: 1 – 15:47**

Over my many years as a Children's Minister Palm Sunday was one of my highlights. For those who were kinesthetic learners the waving of the palm branches became quite exciting. The artists loved drawing or painting the scene, the younger ones happily coloured pictures provided. And often we re-enacted the scene so everyone had something to do and to remember. The boys especially loved shouting Hosanna at the top of their voices! Chaos, noise and more and it would have been very similar when Jesus first rode into town on that young colt.

This Palm Sunday has proved to be quite different for me. As I've read all four gospel accounts and done some research my understanding has deepened. We read of Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem in all four gospels. This was prophesied in Psalm 118, Zephaniah 3, and especially in Zechariah 9:9.

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.

The crowd were there to cheer him, believing he might well be the one coming to save them from the oppression of the Romans. Many had seen his miracles, heard of Lazarus being raised from the dead perhaps, been present in the crowd when thousands were fed with five loaves and two fish. They wanted to believe he would deliver them. They had their own agenda but Jesus had his, to obey the will and purpose of his father in heaven. Even the disciples, despite Jesus making some possibly veiled references to his coming death and that it would be by crucifixion were still more of the mindset that Jesus was coming as their physical hero, their Saviour. My Bible notes say that Hosanna in its original form means 'save us' or 'help us now'.

All four gospels tell of Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. History however records that two men entered Jerusalem – one from the west and Jesus from the Mt of Olives to the east. The Romans, as conquerors, enjoyed showing off their power with a show of might with horses, chariots and foot soldiers, lots of pomp and ceremony. They especially liked these to coincide with the Jewish festivals of which Passover was high in importance. Caesar was held to be the son of a god. The light bearer, the shining one and Pilate was his representative. What a contrast! Pilate in power, showing off his position of importance, promoting Caesar as the king, the son of god, of their known world.

On the other side of town came Jesus, humbly riding on a colt, having declared himself that he was promoting the Kingdom of God, one of peace, justice, love, kindness. Following his way was one of service to others, of not promoting oneself but of dying to oneself. The people declared he was the one ‘who comes in the name of the Lord.’ This was the high point of Jesus ministry up to that time – especially as the people of that day viewed Jesus. If we had looked a little closer we may have noticed that Jesus was crying. Do you know why?

We have the benefit of hindsight. We know that this entry by Jesus is the beginning of passion week which would see those same crowds days later crying out ‘crucify him’ with the same intensity as when they waved their palms and shouted ‘hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ We weren’t there physically on that occasion but each one of us in our way has probably held both those points of view possibly many times over. After this event Jesus openly declares that his death is fast approaching and that he will be crucified but that he will rise again!

As N.T. Wright, Anglican Bishop & New Testament scholar, quotes in John for Everyone 2...

*Jesus’ death will be like sowing a seed in the ground. **It will look like a tragedy....In fact, it will be a triumph; the triumph of God’s self-giving***

love, the love that looks death itself in the face and defeats it by meeting it voluntarily, on behalf of not just of Israel, but of the whole world...

So what does this mean for us? Yes, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was a triumphal entry and next Sunday we celebrate afresh his ultimate triumph. Through not walking away from his crucifixion though told to save himself, he overcame both death and satan with his resurrection. Come back next week for that glorious testimony to life, for all mankind, in all its abundance.

This week the invitation / challenge to each of us is to spend time walking **with Jesus** through passion week. (John devotes over 1/3 of his gospel to passion week in Chapters 11-21.) May we each ask Jesus to give us a deeper understanding of **his** overwhelming love and grace towards us – even through his betrayal by Judas, his agony as he prayed in the garden, his arrest, ridicule, shame and abuse, his mock trial and his death by crucifixion.

Join us for one or more of the many opportunities at St Peter's over this next week to journey together through this week of intense passion, grief and pain which then leads to triumphant joy with Jesus' resurrection.