

Sunday 28th March 2021 - Palm Sunday - Readings and Sermon

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21 v1-11 (NIV)

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

'Say to Daughter Zion,
"See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

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

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

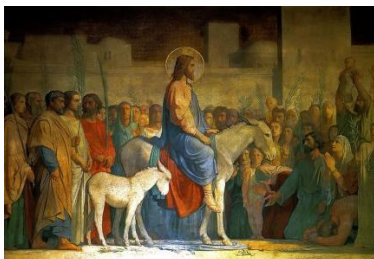
The Talk by Rev'd Kelvin Woolmer



There's an old adage for preaching for a three point sermon; it says: "Tell 'em what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them again!"

Matthew has gone a bit overboard and is telling us several times what the point of this story is. In fact he's so keen we hear the reason for all that happens he tells us twelve times, and I bet you can't remember what it was can you? He says twelve times: 'This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet ...' and in fact after this chapter he says it again two more times!

Matthew makes a point that he doesn't want us to forget— that the events surrounding Jesus are the fulfilment of earlier prophecy which all reveal the will of God. How do we know that? We can see it easily written in the Old Testament.



Matthew quotes *Zechariah 9*: 'Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

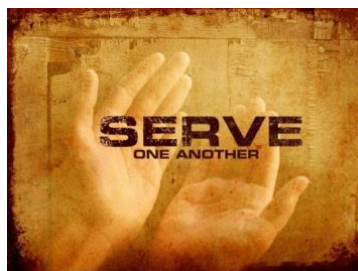
What he has done is leave out the end of that verse, the bit where it says 'triumphant and victorious is he.' Which got me thinking: 'why?' Wasn't it a 'triumphant entry into Jerusalem?' I mean, everyone went wild didn't they? Palms lay out before him, people shouting his name calling him Messiah? That sounds like a 'triumph' surely? Well not entirely.



The mission of Jesus wasn't to be a king on earth as we recognised kings in the past. He didn't enter Jerusalem

on a big horse, in battle armour, holding a sword above his head shouting “Now is the time to start the revolution!” He was on a donkey. Not exactly a battle horse is it?

This is all indication of the very thing that Matthew our Gospel writer keeps saying: ‘This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet.’



And Jesus quotes the Old Testament prophet when he tells the disciples: “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant... just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” I.e. Your greatness will be measured by the extent of your service.

There’s no talk of a physical revolution here, is there? There’s no Russian Revolution or fighting on the streets in Bristol by the anarchists who seek to attack the police and take control for themselves? No this is a king who will win our hearts and minds in the fight to save each one of us from ourselves. That’s the revolution! He has come to be a sacrifice to save us for Himself.

Matthew stresses the humility of Jesus. King Jesus rides a humble donkey - not what we expect of a king. Jesus shows us that a donkey can be a really good thing as long as you don’t act like one! This is not a military procession but a parade for another purpose.

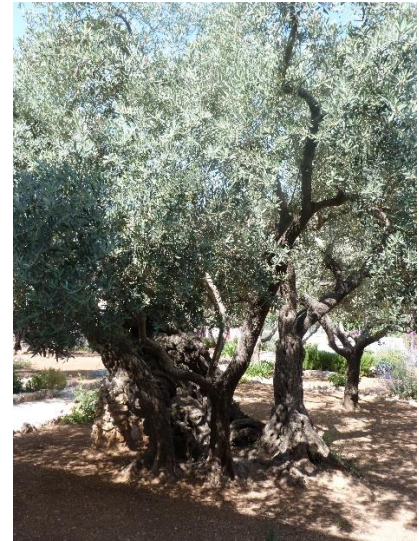


There’s no violence and bloodshed. But there is peace achieved through a different means. Though it may look like a typical military procession of the day for a triumphant national hero - the spreading of branches and cloaks before Jesus as a symbol of honour; the

shouts of acclamation; Jesus riding through the adoring crowds. There are no weapons or chariots or soldiers or swords.

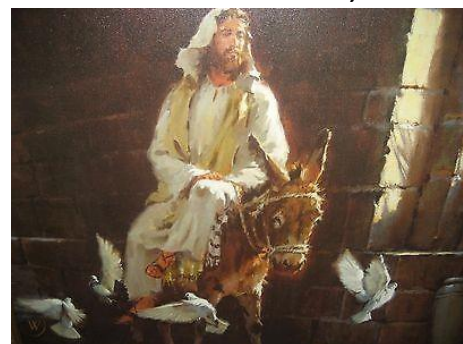
There is just an unarmed Messiah on a donkey, riding in to Jerusalem.

Jesus comes from the Mount of Olives, which is where the Messiah was expected to appear but he surely doesn't look or act like one. Honestly this donkey doesn't inspire confidence in a revolution does it?



Jesus rides a donkey to subvert the imperial logic of the Pax Romana: 'Roman peace.' The Pax Romana was the period of relative peace in the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD for the Roman Empire. It lasted around 200 years or so and was considered the 'glory days' for Rome as it hit its peak in prosperity. But they maintained peace by military control.

Jesus' symbolic; yet distinct, entry turns notions of power and authority on their head. He reveals that you don't have to lead, or rule, by tyrannical domination and intimidation. Jesus shows that he leads by non-violent love and from a place of vulnerability. A simple, humble, non-violent, peaceful procession may be the most intimidating practice.



When Jesus enters Jerusalem the whole city was in 'turmoil.' So we know not everyone is happy, not everyone's shouting "Hosanna!" The entry of Jesus shakes things up. He comes with peace. On the face of it, this is a seemingly harmless procession which just attracts a lot of enthusiastic joy.

When Jesus enters Jerusalem; and it says the whole city was in turmoil, this can also be interpreted that the whole city 'shook' saying: "Who is this?" Jerusalem authority shook with fear because they didn't know if this was going to be a revolt and their power would be lost or would the revolutionaries attack and kill them.



If you remember the Romanian Revolution in 1989, it started with small groups of people who had 'had enough' of being subjected to the Communist Government's whims, and within a few days the President, his wife and half the Government had been lined up against the wall and shot. Perhaps the leaders in Jerusalem were worried how this procession into Jerusalem would 'play out'?

We know if God had wanted it to be that way it would have been - but then we would have a cult of earthly physical power - much like a dictatorship. Not the power and authority of love which Jesus wants us to follow.

I'm not saying Jesus wasn't a powerful man in his own *human* person: remember he lost his temper with the money changers - he overturns the tables of the moneychangers and reclaims the temple for his purpose after this procession into Jerusalem



Jesus didn't come to rule in Jerusalem by military might - he came to rule a world by humility, sacrifice and love.

He makes each one of us a 'soldier' for his mission; so when you acknowledge Jesus as your own personal King and Saviour, you literally join the 'Jesus Army' - this group we call Christians is all about telling people about Jesus.

Jesus knew he was going to die as a sacrifice for us; he wasn't some despot ruler who set themselves up as a charismatic leader and sent others to fight in his place. When he died, he died for each of us so we know when we tell others about him, he is there next to us helping us do his will.

I have thought hard and long on this and I am convinced that Jesus didn't need Simon of Cyrene to help him carry the cross, but he did it to show that we are able to be involved in his mission to save others.



Jesus came to change the world and us because of love.

At the beginning, I told you that Matthew had told us twelve times 'This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet ...' God had been planning this; planning to send his own son to die for you and to die for me. Isn't that just so very thought provoking that God thinks that you and I are worth saving?

Christ's walk is our walk. His walk through the Holy Land to spread the Word; his walk to the place of death - we are also involved. He is not a dictator to impose on us a rule of fear. He died to show us love; and it's easy for us to follow Jesus because he's done all the hard work. He has taken the walk to death and come back to show us he can bring us eternal life.

Now that's the revolution! That's the new way of things! That's the new world order, and it's ours to have and to hold if we just follow Jesus!