

Palm Sunday thoughts

Welcome to Palm Sunday. I can't believe it's a year since we locked down and what a year it has been. Thankfully, this year we will be able to celebrate Easter, the resurrection of our Saviour.

Firstly let us pray.

Lord, thank you for your son, Jesus, who you sent to us.

As we celebrate Palm Sunday, help us to rejoice along with the people of Jerusalem as they lay down their cloaks and palm leaves to welcome Jesus, who rode triumphantly into the city knowing what lay ahead of him. As we approach Good Friday help us to see how much Jesus loves us by dying for us on the cross.

Amen

This week is Palm Sunday. I have no idea where the year has gone but here we are awaiting the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. What an amazing sight that would have been. I have always wondered what it would have been like to be there on that day, the crowds admiring the young man on the back of the donkey shouting Hosanna to the King at the top of our voices.

Well instead of a biblical hero this week I thought it would be a good idea to get an insight into 3 or 4 people who were there on the day in question. I have used a bit of "Poetic licence" to think about things from a different perspective. Sometimes it is good to view a well know story in a different way and allow God to speak to us. The true account is in all the gospels. Matthew 21: 1-17 leads straight onto cleansing the temple. At the end of the "stories" are some thoughts to reflect on and maybe ask God what that means for each one of us in the week ahead.

Firstly, imagine being up at the crack of dawn to feed your livestock, two men approach you and ask to take your young donkey that hasn't been broken in yet, what do you do? Do you question them as to why? ask for money? Say no?

Well let's find out....

Josh, Josh where's our donkey gone? Have you sold him already?

No I haven't, I gave him away.

What do you mean you gave him away? Why would you do such a stupid thing we needed the money to buy items in the temple later and for the offering tax, anyway breakfast is ready.

Why did I give my youngest donkey to those two men? I mean, they came up and asked me politely, saying we need your donkey, and I couldn't refuse I have no idea what came over me, I couldn't ask for any money, I let the donkey go just like that, am I going mad, I was overcome with emotion.....

How am I going to explain this to my wife over breakfast? I don't think she will be very happy with me. The men said they needed the donkey for The master, Jesus, I've heard this chap has done some miracles from stories that have been circulating inside and outside of the temple, I wonder if Pilate knows Jesus is coming to town. But those men had something about them, said they were two of his followers, why did I let the colt go for nothing.....

Hang on why is there a crowd gathering in town? People are pulling down palm branches off the trees, waving them in the air and making a path with them and their cloaks. What is going on? ... Hang on that's my donkey being ridden, as though he has always had someone on his back!

Meanwhile, in the crowd, there's a small child aged about 6/7. I'm not sure where her parents are but she's trying to get to the front so that she can see.

“I must get through the forest of legs, mum said there’s a new king coming and I’m going to say hello to him when I see him and maybe he’ll make me a princess and I can live in the palace with him. Eeewww those feet smell didn’t anyone have a bath last week? I did, mum made sure I bathed in the river near our house. I need to get closer to the front, there are so many people here, I hope mama can find me afterwards it’s a little scary. Ouch that palm leaf just hit my head, oh well nearly there just one more little push ...yes I’ve made it I’m at the front.

Ok here goes. Hosanna, Hosanna! I hope he can hear my beautiful singing, I’ve been practising. I can see a man on a donkey with a big smile on his face. That’s who this is all for but he doesn’t look like a king. Who is he? Everyone’s calling him Jesus, wow is that Jesus? he looks so ordinary. I’ve heard lots of amazing stories about Jesus from people around me, they say he’s helped lots of sick people and fed lots and lots and lots of hungry people with a little bit of bread and a few fish, I wish my lunch could feed lots of people but it never really fills me up much as it is... look he’s getting closer to me I wonder if he’s going to tell any stories today, I like stories. Hosanna! Jesus! Over here.

He smiled at me I feel so happy there is something special about him, he may not look like a King but I hope I can meet him one day.”

Meanwhile up at the temple one of the temple money changers is beginning to feel the heat of the sun burning his neck and making him even more grumpy, the day is going slowly there’s hardly a crowd and the money isn’t flowing as it should be, he knows its wrong to charge more than is necessary for an exchange rate, but everyone does it. He shouts at the men selling the offering animals ‘will you get them to quieten down, their being far too noisy’, the animals know there only there for one reason and that is as a sacrifice. The man goes back to his ledgers to try and do some calculations, when he hears a crowd approaching out front. Finally some custom at last, he thinks, but

within seconds he realises the crowd is singing, waving palm leaves in the air and laying down cloaks on the dusty road. He stands up and walks to the entrance, he cannot believe what he is seeing, there's a man riding a donkey what is going on? Why is everyone cheering and singing Hosanna? Why are they calling on this man to Save them as if he is God or a Prophet? (Hosanna means save us we pray)

Suddenly it dawns on him, "Is this the troublemaker Jesus I've been hearing about, supposedly making blind people see, and making that lame walk, ha yeah right I'll believe it when I see it."

Oh he's coming closer, nah I'm sure he'll go round the temple after all it's a huge market in there today not much else going on, hang on a moment he's stopped and is getting off the donkey and heading my way I hope he's not going to cause any trouble.....

Three different versions of the same story, all seen through three different sets of eyes and hearts.

Traditionally entering a city on a donkey symbolized peace, rather than entering on a war horse. You might want to look up why He chose a colt rather than an older donkey.

The Palm tree was considered a Noble tree and represents righteousness Psalm 92:12 Song of Solomon 7:7,8. The branches are considered a symbol of Victory, Triumph, Peace and Eternal life. The spreading of Cloaks was an act of homage to royalty (2 Kings: 9:13). Note that the disciples put their cloaks on the donkey and the people on the road.

The words shouted out in Matt 21v9 are straight from Psalm 118:25-26

Jesus' purpose in riding into Jerusalem was to make public His claim to be their Messiah and fulfil the OT prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. Jesus enters Jerusalem as King and heads to His Palace – not Herod's palace but the House of God the Holy Temple, where He cleans the courts

(the duty of priests and servants) ready to take his place. Only when the temple is cleaned can he perform Miracles and accept the praise from the children.

If we considered the imaginary characters, I wonder what their reactions would be if they witnessed the cleansing of the temple. Matthew 21:12-17 and heard the discussions during the week. Did the donkey get returned to his owner? Did the money Changers set there stalls up the next day as if nothing had happened or did they change their ways? What did the children think and feel with Jesus encouraging them to go into the temple and have fun?

How long did the excitement and Euphoria last? A lot happens in 5 days from Palm Sunday to Good Friday. Shouts of Hosanna turn to shouts of Crucify!

Do any of the Characters or situations resonate with you at the moment? Take some time out this week to stop, read, think and ask God to speak to you.

Like with the “stories” each one of us have been in situations where our own experiences appear different to others who witnessed the same event, it is often the same when God talks to us, He cares for us individually and has a unique plan just for you.

Be Blessed.