

Today is Palm Sunday and we usually focus on two events that occurred on this day two thousand years ago. The first event we note is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, when the people had a great celebration of their coming Messiah. The second event is the clearing of the temple when Jesus, in his righteous anger, cleared the temple courtyards of the money changers and traders that were defiling this holy place. Most preachers tend to deal with these events as two separate entities, as if they are not connected. I think there is a connection to these two events, and to the times we are living in now.

Let's start with the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. I'm sure we all know the story: Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the back of young donkey, and the people form a procession to welcome Jesus as their champion. They spread their cloaks and palm leaves on the ground in front of him and shouted Hosanna, which means *Save me* in Hebrew. The people saw Jesus as a Messiah who had come to save them, and they called out *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*. They appeared to recognise Jesus' true identity as the Messiah, and the people of Jerusalem were welcoming Jesus as a King. But they didn't understand what kind of Messiah Jesus actually was. The people of Jerusalem were looking for someone who would save them from the tyranny they lived under; the tyranny of the Roman soldiers who occupied their land. And the tyranny and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees who forced people to obey the Jewish law while breaking it themselves.

Jesus knew what His mission was, and it had a much larger purpose than just freeing the people from their current difficult circumstances. Jesus knew that those who were cheering him as their Messiah, would soon change in the week ahead. Jesus knew that He was entering Jerusalem knowing He was to die there with the same people who cheered, now calling for Barabbas' life to be spared in place of Him.

The good people of Jerusalem preferred to save a common criminal, than Jesus who was perfect, blameless and sinless! If these people had looked and listened properly, they would have seen that Jesus was no warrior in the accepted sense. Jesus asked two of the disciples to go into the village and fetch a colt that hadn't been ridden before. This was to fulfil an Old Testament prophecy. *The Prophet Zechariah had said that God's King would enter the Kingdom by riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, on a colt.* In the Judea of Jesus' time; the donkey was a humble beast used for work. When Kings went to war they rode powerful horses: Jesus rode a donkey to signify that this King was coming in peace! Jesus had come to Jerusalem to set up a Kingdom, but not the kind the Jews were looking for. The prize for Jesus' kingship was not a crown, but a cross!

Later that same day, we learn of Jesus entering the courts of the temple and driving out the money changers and merchants selling items to be used as sacrifices. The money changers were selling a special coin to be used in the temple for offerings, and you had to use this temple currency when making an offering. Jesus overturned their tables and He made a whip from cords and drove those merchants out of the temple courts. He said: *Is it not written: My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers.*

Jesus entered Jerusalem as a King with people praising him. I wonder what His thoughts must have been because He knew that this was the end of His journey, and the end of His life. In chapters nine and ten of Mark, Jesus had predicted His death to the other disciples. Jesus tells His disciples that *We are going to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him, three days later he will rise.* Jesus was very aware of the fate that awaited Him in Jerusalem.

I said in a recent sermon that as a child I was taught to pray: Gentle Jesus meek and mild, and I realise that this prayer is not accurate. Jesus was never meek and mild, because that suggests characteristics that are submissive, and perhaps without control. Jesus was always in control, He chose to follow His Father's will although He could have done otherwise. Jesus knew what His mission was and it was through strength and determination that He completed it, and not through meekness or a mild temperament.

As Jesus entered the temple courtyards He was livid at what He saw. Jesus was raging as he overturned the tables, and He didn't just shout at the merchants to get out. *And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.* (John 2:13 to 16). Jesus had put up with insults before now, He had been rejected by His own family, He had been constantly taunted by the Pharisees, and mocked by His townspeople. What made Him react so violently on Palm Sunday?

I wonder if it was because He knew what entering Jerusalem meant for Him, and that the people were trying to make Him something He was not, namely a warrior king coming to defeat the Romans. There have been times in the earlier days of my ministry, how frustrating it was for people to decide who I was, because I was a minister. There were some who weren't really interested in getting know Mike, they wanted to get to know the minister. They had decided who and what I should be as the minister and they were building me up in their image of a minister. And it was infuriating, not to mention insulting. Here was Jesus coming into Jerusalem on a young donkey, and the people were cheering for a warrior king.

Jesus was coming to save people from their sins by giving His all, and people were looking for something immediate to end their present suffering. When people tried to force me into their mould of what a minister should be, I suffered a little ego damage. When Jesus was being forced into the people's identity, He knew He was giving up His life.

So perhaps we can forgive Jesus' righteous anger and His frustration at being so misunderstood. He was fully human, as well as being fully God. The fact that the people of Jerusalem didn't recognise His purpose as a Saviour, must have been the ultimate rejection. And His Father God could have changed this, He could have saved His Son from this humiliation and rejection, but then Jesus' mission couldn't have been fulfilled. And Jesus knew this, because He had a complete confidence and faith in His Father God. Jesus communicates a simple message to his disciples then, and today; and it's this: *Have faith in God*. Simple as that: *Have faith in God!*

I am reading a book by Kris Vallotton just now and there's a phrase in the book that really spoke to me about God's love, especially at this time: God spoke saying: *I will not remove the scars from your life. Instead I will rearrange them in such a way that they have the appearance of a beautiful carving on a fine piece of crystal*. Jesus, God's own Son had a number of scars and without these scars, especially those in His hands and on His side, He wouldn't be our Saviour Jesus. We all accumulate scars as we go through life, and these scars while painful, made us who we are. And we often draw from our own scars who help others through their pain. If God had intervened to save His Son from what He was going through, where would we be now?

Jesus was fully human and fully God. He felt the same emotions as us. He felt pain when He was rejected. He sensed temptation when placed in certain situations.

Jesus got angry when provoked. Jesus cried through fear in the garden of Gethsemane. The only difference between Jesus and us, is He committed no sin. As we live through these days of the coronavirus, with news of the daily toll on human lives, we can be frightened. As we see the selfishness of people who are not self-isolating and bringing risk to others, or are hoarding food from those who have little. As we read of our health service being unable to cope or not having the appropriate equipment, it's easy to become scared or angry. But take comfort in the fact that Jesus went through all of these emotions, for different reasons perhaps, but there is nowhere we have to go that Jesus has not gone first. Even as we think of the risk of coronavirus, we remember that Jesus ate with lepers and cured the incurable.

So please, consider all that God has done for and in us, and take heart. If we have faith in God and trust He's in control, we will come through. God didn't guarantee a trouble free life, but through His Son, we have the promise of eternal life. So have faith in God. As we enter Holy Week in these challenging and frightening times, we take with us the example of Jesus, who understood His mission, and was prepared to surrender His pride and rely on his heavenly Father. Like Christ, let us have faith in God in every situation. **Amen**

(1707 words)