

Sermon Yr B, Palm Sunday, 28 March 2021 St James

Isa 50:4-9, Mark 11:1-11 or Jn 12:12-16



When was the last time you were at Weston Super Mare beach? Normally we might expect to see coach parties from Birmingham or South Wales,

families wandering along with ice creams and buckets, and of course a queue for the donkey rides - the chance to ride a donkey seeming a major event for kids, one they would talk about for the rest of the day. Not so now we are in lockdown! Well in today's Gospel reading we see another journey on a donkey, one that got an entire city talking in excited anticipation. And we're invited to journey with Jesus, from Palm Sunday and on into Passion week.

As we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we will see joy and anger, trust and betrayal. It is a journey that is bittersweet, for Jesus and for us, because as we read these gospel accounts, they come to life, and like watching actors on stage we glimpse our own occasional darker intentions reflected in their characters. It reminds us that, for all the beauty of the world and the good humanity is capable of, our world and ourselves remain to be mended. And in Passion week we see how God steps in to help

Rev. Andrew Hiscox

us. Palm Sunday begins as a day of anticipation. Matthew's gospel account conveys a building joy and momentum: Matt 21:10 "*When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, Who is this?*" The anticipation and jubilation reveal the expectation that people had: Perhaps it was this man, Jesus, who would deliver them from their Roman oppressors. '*Hosanna!*' They cry joyfully as Jesus comes by, which means, '*Save us!*' Surely this was the promised Messiah, the one to mend their situation, the one to place their hope in? What are we hoping for this Easter? Perhaps it's for our turn in the vaccine queue, hoping for deliverance from the coronavirus which oppresses us, like the Romans oppressed the Jews. Maybe this time has given us cause to reflect on our own mortality and how the things we place our hope in can be fickle. And like those people who lined the streets, we wonder what kind of king this Jesus is, whether he will disappoint.

At the Vicarage, we've been watching recently the Netflix series 'The Crown' and this latest run focuses on the Diana and Margaret Thatcher years. We see the Royal family and Prime minister in all their finery, and yet behind the scenes is laid bare the strain of change, the fracture of family relationships and the weight of public opinion. So often when we look to human examples of leadership and power, we see authority abused. I think this why some people become cynical. Cynics are simply people of hope who have lived long enough to become disappointed.

What makes Jesus the one to place our hope in? There is almost a comic moment when he rocks up on a donkey. Holy

God, on an untamed colt. He is the antithesis of their expectation and perhaps ours – no wealth, no entourage, no trooping of the colours; no army, no fanfare, no YouTube channel or social media following. Just Jesus.

All is as it should be. This is not a king influenced by money, politics, earthly power and kingdoms. He has a greater mission in mind – to mend humanity and all creation. The truth is being laid bare for all who have eyes to see it; prophecy written hundreds of years before is being fulfilled: Ps 118 says *“the stone the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone”* and Zech 9:9 proclaims, *“Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Palm Sunday teaches us that Jesus’ actions have as much significance as his words. Scholars tell us there is significance in Jesus choosing a donkey and her colt. The donkey, a beast of burden, represents the Jews under the burden of Old Testament law, struggling to be good enough to fulfil it. The untamed colt symbolises the unreached Gentile nations. But I think the fact that Jesus would choose a donkey also symbolises God’s perspective on power, authority and kingship. Things that have become corrupted, Jesus comes to mend. Not the king we expected, but the king we needed. He is the image of our once and future king, the one we can be confident in placing our hope in.

Henry Milman’s words are fitting to conclude:

1. Ride on, ride on in majesty
as all the crowds 'Hosanna!' cry:
through waving branches, slowly ride,
O Saviour, to be crucified.
2. Ride on, ride on in majesty
the angel armies of the sky
look down with sad, and wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.
3. Ride on, ride on in majesty,
in lowly pomp ride on to die:
bow your meek head, to mortal pain,
then take, O God, your power and reign!

