

Sermon for Palm Sunday 28 March 2021, Mark 11:1-11, Mark 15:1-39, Philippians 2:5-11

Lord Jesus help us see you as you want us to rather than what we would like you to be. Amen

*'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!..... 5 days later.....'Crucify him!'*

- Today is Palm Sunday and in our 2 readings from Mark's gospel we hear of the beginning and end of Holy Week. Jesus's last week on earth as fully human and fully divine. The finale to the 3 years of mission, of bringing the Good News of God's love, of Jesus being totally obedient to God.
- We see the huge shift in emotion from the massive crowds in Jerusalem coming together to celebrate Passover, to the crowds on Good Friday baying for Jesus' blood. Picture the excitement the anticipation of the most important festival of the year where the Jews were about to celebrate and relive their historic escape from slavery in Egypt, saved by their living God thousands of years ago from an oppressive regime they were living under then.
- Link that to a build up of 3 years of Jesus living, healing and preaching among the Jews – convincing huge numbers of people that he was the long awaited Messiah – the Saviour sent from God to free them from the Roman oppression they *now* found themselves living under.
- But they didn't pick up on the truth that Jesus was presenting right in front of their eyes:
- He didn't ride majestically into Jerusalem on a powerful white horse like the king they had in their minds' eye, ready to save them, ready to incite them to a violent overthrow of the Romans, using battle tactics like the kings of old in the state of Israel.

***The Jesus they saw was what they wanted to see..... not the real Jesus.***

- Didn't they notice that Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on the back of a humble donkey – the colt of a donkey, borrowed from someone locally, fulfilling a prophecy about the Messiah arriving peacefully, simply but powerfully in a non-violent way?
- Maybe some did understand the significance and think of the reference by Zechariah but to be fair even his closest disciples didn't get the whole picture and we ourselves have the benefit of hindsight, re-reading the story in our bibles and of reading about the links to prophesy.
- If you had been there, wouldn't you have been caught up in the excitement, not caring if it was the real picture, but only what you wanted to make of it?

***Is the Jesus you connect with in your life the real Jesus?***

- Can you stand at the foot of the cross like Jesus's mother did? Like his disciple John did? Can you face the truth of what Jesus did for you? He died an innocent man, he was not a sinner, was not whipping up a violent rebellion but he died for you and for me to set us once and for all in a right relationship with God by taking our sins on himself with the most powerful act of love imaginable.
- What drew you towards Jesus? and I wonder if it is the same for us today as for people then?
- Peace, healing, wholeness, the hope of a new start, the hope of forgiveness, the game plan for a fairer society and a belief in his ability to transform? Has it changed from your first encounter I wonder?
- Can we be present to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit within us drawing us deeper into God's love for us and allowing it to flow out in how we live our lives today and how we react to others?
- Dare we take that risk, that step of faith, to be radical, to be different from how most of the world lives, to dare to stand up for God's values? Because I believe that is what Jesus is calling each of us to do. He is drawing us in, to experience emotion as we encounter him in our own individual ways of serving him. He doesn't want us to put him on a pedestal and worship from a safe distance, he wants us to come close, to feel both his love and compassion for us and the inspiration and fiery energy he can inspire in us to act in his name – whether that is praying for people and situations, speaking up for the powerless, giving a friendly wave to people you meet, reaching out in some way to other people to improve their lives whether it's a few seconds or radically far-reaching.

- Who are your heroes – people you look up to, think are marvellous and put on a bit of a pedestal? We all have them- celebrities, footballers, politicians. Can you see Christ’s love for all God’s creation working through them? Mine at the moment are Marcus Rashford, Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough.
- But they are all human and therefore fallible and sooner or later will show some flaw to their personality or be tripped up by their fame and the temptations power brings, making them less than perfect in our eyes although we may wish to airbrush out the negative side and keep only seeing the wonderful ,although it is false. It brings us down to earth, to reality- we can still admire them but our feelings are more realistic and takes us out of our bubble of hero worship.
- But Jesus isn’t like that . Only Jesus is perfect – he was fully human except in one respect – he was without sin- *he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*
- But following Jesus is not always a bed of roses – sometimes we are uplifted by the power of God and the feeling of his presence , maybe the wonder of the natural world but at other times we struggle to be humble , to be generous to others, financially or in the words we use, to serve God when we would rather be doing things where our ego leads us – that is the time we need Jesus most, when we realise he is a rather uncomfortable friend, when Jesus speaks the truth we don’t want to hear, when we are really challenged to repent and seek forgiveness and change our ways to become more attuned to God’s ways.

***Is the Jesus you connect with in your life the real Jesus?***

- Of course we identify with the crowds shouting Hosanna – it is right to give thanks and praise to God – to Jesus , our Saviour.
- And it’s easy to condemn the crowds who shouted “crucify him” – we wouldn’t have done that would we? We wouldn’t have been swayed by the mass hysteria of the moment to find a scapegoat for our anger and frustration would we? Hopefully not, but who knows? No one spoke up in support of Jesus, or even stayed awake to pray with him at his darkest hour in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- But many of us do lap up sensationalist stories in the press or social media, drawn in by the headline and not bothering to read or try to understand the back story or even wonder if what we are being fed is the truth.
- Jesus is the one who can give us the true way to live, the hope in an ever-loving and everlasting God who so desperately loves us and wishes us to follow but Jesus himself tells us it is not an easy path to follow ,but that will be ***connecting with the real Jesus***, the one who transforms us and brings true fulfilment in our lives.
- So when you next feel you are being swept along in life at such a speed that you lose your patience or things seem bleak, try and stop for a moment , throw your emotions on God through prayer, trust that Jesus can ease the burden because he understands – he went through human existence to the ultimate end. And *“let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”*

Let us be humble, acknowledge and ask for His help and then by the power of the Holy Spirit I believe we *can* come through our darkest hours , because Jesus did just that for us by dying on the cross. We can then truly feel the enormous joy and energy of the resurrection on Easter Day if we let Jesus transform our weakness and sin now and every day.

Amen