

Luke 19:28-40

Jesus makes his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He comes as a hero, acclaimed and heralded by the crowds, a stark contrast to what will take place in a few days time. One aspect of Luke's account which differs from the other gospels is that there is no mention of palm branches or of hosannas. It could be that these were associated with parades and celebrations of a nationalistic nature and Luke didn't want that association. In Luke's account, the participants are seen as very much Jesus's followers, and not random crowds. But there is no doubting their adulation of Jesus. Nor is there any doubt about the intent and message that Jesus gives in his journey into Jerusalem.

This was a well-planned journey. Jesus has already arranged for a young donkey to be available for his use. Why a donkey? There are two reasons. Firstly, he is fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah. *'Rejoice greatly, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey, even on a donkey's colt.'* Zechariah 9:9.

Secondly, it was a deliberate claim to be a king of a certain kind in that a donkey in Palestine was not the lowly animal we consider it today. It was noble, and it denoted peace. Only in war did leaders ride on a horse. So by choosing a donkey Jesus was making a conscious and very firm statement that he was a king of love and peace, and not a conquering military hero whom the Israelites wanted and expected as their Messiah.

It was an act of great courage on the behalf of Jesus. He was a wanted man. The Jewish leaders were looking to accost and apprehend him, and yet here is, large as life, making a very public and bold entry into Jerusalem. He is throwing down the gauntlet to the religious leaders.

Then in Luke's account we don't have the strewing of palms in front of Jesus, but we do have the laying down of cloaks on the road in front of him and the singing from the great psalm of praise (Psalm 118) that pilgrims always sang on the way to Jerusalem.

It is a scene of immense jubilation and celebration, and Jesus himself captures the mood and the spirit of the occasion so beautifully in that last verse, when in response to the

Pharisees telling him to put a dampener on his followers' enthusiasm, he says, 'If they kept quiet, the stones themselves would burst into cheers.' I just love that imagery. Stone is the absolute antithesis to cheerfulness. When we talk about a stony look or stare, we mean cold, unfriendly, frosty. So to have stones bursting into cheers really does emphasise so vividly the immense joy and elation of Jesus's followers. Jesus had a knack of using simple images to make vivid and graphic points.

One of the interesting aspects of Holy Week is how the people turned from a hero-worshipping crowd on Palm Sunday into a mob baying for the blood of Jesus later in the week. But that is human nature, isn't it? We all have our good side but we do have our not so good side, sometimes even our dark side. I do need to reiterate the point that in Luke's gospel the Palm Sunday crowd are very much followers of Jesus, so they probably weren't part of the crowd calling for his death later in the week. In the other gospels the Palm Sunday crowd appears to be larger and made up of the general populace, and many of them, more than likely, changed their tune a few days later. Whatever the case, it does highlight the fact that human nature has a variety of shades oscillating between the light and the dark.

*There's the story of two men, both seriously ill, in the same small room in a hospital. In fact, the room was so small that there was only one small window in it looking out onto the world. One of the men could move somewhat and was allowed once a day to sit up in his bed next to the window. On those occasions he could look out, which is why his bed was next to the window. But the other man had to spend all his time flat on his back, which is why his bed was not near the window. Every afternoon, when the man next to the window was propped up for his hour of treatment, he would pass the time describing to his roommate what he could see outside. From what he described, the window apparently overlooked a park where there was a lake. There were ducks and swans in the lake, and children came to throw them bread and to sail model boats. Young lovers walked hand in hand beneath the trees, and there were flowers and stretches of grass and games of softball. And at the back, behind a ring of trees, was a fine view of the city skyline.*

*All this the man patiently described to his roommate to lift his spirits. He told him how a child nearly fell into the lake, and how lovely the girls looked in their summer dresses, and all kinds of adventurous things to pass the time away. His roommate could almost feel he was there in the park. Then*

*one afternoon a dark thought hit him. Why should the man next to the window have all the pleasure of seeing what was going on? Why shouldn't he get the chance? It wasn't fair. He tried to stifle such thoughts, but each day they became stronger. His jealousy grew, his soul became soured.*

*Something had to change.*

*Well, one night as he lay there with his thoughts, staring at the ceiling, the other man suddenly woke up with a start. He coughed and coughed and tried to grope for the button that would bring the nurse running, but he wasn't able to grasp it. The other man watched. He could have pressed his button but some dark, invisible force stopped him. The next morning the nurse came in and found that the other man had died. The next day, the man asked if he could be moved to the bed near the window. So they moved him, tucked him in and made him comfortable.*

*The minute they left, he laboriously hauled himself up on one elbow and looked out the window. It faced a blank wall.*

One man brought a ray of sunshine into another man's world. One man had darkness in his heart. He thought only of himself, to the exclusion of the well-being of his fellow human being. Just as the crowd on Palm Sunday and later in Holy Week reflect the contrasting character of human nature, so do the two men in our story. Often we probably belong to either one camp or the other, but often we could easily have a foot in both camps. I am sure that was the case for many of the crowd on Palm Sunday.

What gives us cause for optimism is that light will always conquer darkness. You turn on a light in the dark, the darkness disappears. Love will always conquer hate. Easter Sunday is a perfect example of this.

Another vivid example of this is Christchurch. An act of evil on a scale that is difficult to comprehend was carried out, but what is etched on our memory? Undoubtedly, it is the outpouring of love that emanated from the people of Christchurch and throughout the country. It is the grace of the families of the victims. And what really blew me away is that not long after this tragedy, thousands of people across the country came together for prayer! Who said faith was dead? You could have fooled me!