

## Sermon Palm Sunday 2021

Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem. The beginning of a momentous week in Jerusalem, the beginning of what we now call Holy Week. The beginning of the events leading up to the terrible crucifixion of Jesus, but also the glorious resurrection of Jesus, the event which is primarily responsible for the creation and existence of our Christian religion. And in some ways, the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem mirrors the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. They are both journeys of triumph, a time when Jesus is recognised and proclaimed as King.

This was a well-planned journey. Jesus has already arranged for a 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.'* Zechariah 9:9.

Secondly, it was a deliberate aim to be a king of a certain kind in that a donkey in Palestine was not the lowly animal we consider 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.

There is another aspect to this point. The donkey, albeit being considered to be noble, is a beast of burden that speaks of service. We know that Jesus's brand of leadership was servant leadership. That was emphasised in his gesture of washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper, which we will be celebrating in our Washing of the Feet service on Thursday evening. So by riding on a donkey he is mocking the Roman military leaders riding on their horses. He is contrasting his leadership the style of leadership with the sort of leadership the Jews expected from their Messiah. You could say that he was engaging in very effective street theatre.

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 very much the nature of the human disposition, isn't it? We all have our good side but at times the not such a good side invariably surfaces.

I do need to make the point that the crowd hailing Jesus on Palm Sunday and the crowd baying for his blood a few days later were probably two quite different crowds. However, it does serve to 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 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 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 his time flat on his back, which was why his bed was not next to the window.*

*Every afternoon, when the man next to the window was propped up in his bed for an hour, 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 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. 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 a 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 with his thoughts, staring at the ceiling, the other man suddenly woke up with a start. He coughed and choked and tried to grope for the button that would summon the nurse, but he wasn't able to grasp it. The other man watched. He could have pressed the button but some dark invisible force stopped him. The next morning the nurse came in and found that the man had died. The next day the other man asked if he could be switched to the bed next to the window. So they moved him.*

*The minute they left, he laboriously propped 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 was somewhat more selfish. This contrast in attitude and character was exemplified in the contrast between the crowd on Palm Sunday and the crowd later in the week. Where do we fit? I am sure it would be with the Palm Sunday crowd but we are human and there will be times when perhaps we can be found siding with the crowd that in their ignorance, or perhaps just being caught up in the moment, make a misguided call.

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