

Sermon Palm Sunday 2025

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 Luke 19:29-40

On Palm Sunday Jesus rides into Jerusalem to the acclaim and adulation of the crowds. They claim him as King. A few days later they turn on him, but then later, following his death and resurrection, he is reclaimed as King. If nothing else, a very good reflection on the fickle nature of humans.

It was Passover time and Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims. They had come from near and far. Jesus could not have chosen a more dramatic time to make a statement – it as a city surging with people and what's more, the reason they were there was a religious reason. A very clever piece of planning!

The crowds received Jesus like a king. They spread their cloaks before him. There is the famous story of Sir Walter Raleigh, one of the great explorers and travellers during the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1. On one occasion he was with the queen when she was walking through London and came to a place where rainwater had made the ground muddy. He quickly took off his cloak and placed it on the ground so the queen could walk over without getting mud on her feet. The tale may or may not be true, but it illustrates a very good point associated with Palm Sunday.

It's a very special gesture, especially if the cloak is the only one you have got, which probably wasn't the case with Raleigh. It says quite clearly that you are celebrating and valuing this person about as highly as you can.

It is not mentioned in Luke's version but we do know that they cut down and waved palm branches. They shouted 'Hosanna!', which is a cry of hope from an oppressed people living under Roman rule and it means, 'Save us now,' They had been waiting generations for the Messiah and he was finally here. Just week later, Jesus would save them, but not in a way they would have imagined.

It is a scene of immense jubilation and celebration, and Jesus himself captures 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.'* Luke 19:40. I just love that imagery. Stone is the absolute antithesis to cheerfulness. When we talk about a stony look, we mean cold, unfriendly. So to have stones bursting into cheers really does emphasise so vividly the immense joy of Jesus' followers. Jesus had a knack of using simple imagery to make vivid and graphic points.

This event shows us three things about Jesus. It shows us his courage. Jesus knew what lay ahead of him. He knew the authorities were out to get him but he wasn't ducking for cover, and in fact quite the contrary. He knew it was time to bring it all to a head. He was so very aware of what he had to go through and he wasn't looking forward to it. This became very apparent when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane following the Last Supper: *'Father, if it is at all possible, take this cup of suffering away from me.'* Matthew 26:39. It gives us a glimpse into the humanness of Jesus. But he knew what he had to do.

It shows us his claim to be the Messiah. By riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, he was fulfilling the prophecy made by 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. He was making a statement, confirming what he had been saying all along – I am God's anointed one.

He was actually making a further statement by riding on a donkey, and this was a statement about the nature of his Messianic claim. The Jews were expecting and hoping for a warrior-type of Messiah, a leader who would lead the Jews to victory over their enemies. A warrior would ride on a horse, not a donkey. A donkey was a humble beast of burden. Jesus is making a statement that he was to be a Messiah of peace and service. This, of course, was why so many Jews couldn't accept him as their Messiah. But that is another story.

And thirdly, it shows us his appeal. There was so much about Jesus that attracted people to him – what he said and how he said it, what he did, his mana, his personality. Throughout his ministry Jesus constantly drew crowds of people. His ride into Jerusalem was a vivid demonstration of this. It wasn't just the numbers, it was how they responded to him. It was overt hero worship. He was a rock star!

Two thousand years later we sit here and we worship Jesus. We lustily sing hymns in praise of him and we acknowledge his greatness. There is a delightful passage from Philippians which says it all: *'So at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is lord, to the glory of the Father.'* Philippians 2:10-11. Beautiful words, but this praise and acknowledgment is meaningless if we fail to take on board the lessons to be learned from him. Jesus has given us the tools, the rest is up to us.

There is the story of an elderly carpenter who was ready to retire. He told his employer of his plans to leave the house-building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife, enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck but they would get by.

The employer was sorry to see his good worker go and asked him if he could build just one more house as a personal favour. The carpenter said yes but it was soon obvious that his heart wasn't in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career.

When the carpenter finished the build, his employer handed him the front door key and said, 'This house is yours. This is my gift to you in gratitude for all the good work you have done for me over the years.'

What a shock. What a shame. If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it very differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well.

So it is with us. We need to think of ourselves as carpenters. Jesus has given us the tools necessary to build good lives. We all know what they are, but just as a reminder, as someone said, *'The foundation stones for a successful life are honesty, integrity, love and faith.'* If we are to do justice to our faith, then those are the tools we employ in our everyday lives. If we are to do justice to our worship and praise, then those are the tools we employ in our everyday lives. I quote from our first reading from 1 Corinthians, *'Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder.'* 1 Corinthians 3:10. Then and only then, will our praise be meaningful.