

## 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 – Podcast for Palm Sunday

*(Based on Bible Reading – Matthew 21:1-11 from NRSV)*

This Sunday, Palm Sunday, is also marked as the 'Second Sunday of the Passion' – acknowledging the dual focus of this day in the Church's calendar.

We've just heard the story as the gospel of Matthew records it, with Jesus entering into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives near Bethphage.

The story highlights the careful planning that had obviously already taken place in Jesus' instruction to the two disciples to procure the animals for his use; it seems to imply he had already agreed this with their owner who was willing to help Jesus in this way.

The crowd celebrate Jesus' arrival with cloaks and branches from the trees placed on the road before him and offer up the festival cry of – 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'

So there is preparation, willing service and joy in this occasion.

But there is also the hint of things to come, harder, darker times in the challenge that this overt display laid down to the religious leaders of the day and the Roman officials.

As well as the joy of some of the crowd as Jesus enters Jerusalem, we are also told that the city is in turmoil and others ask 'Who is this?'

Palm Sunday seeks to hold together these two aspects of this event as the earthly ministry of Jesus reaches its climatic conclusion – here is 'Good News', yes but it will come at great cost.

Jesus comes as King – but not as a warrior King, triumphantly charging in on a splendid warhorse to save his people from oppression but as a humble sovereign, on a colt, an animal that had never been ridden before and needed gentle handling and encouragement for its task. Here it's thought that Matthew is referencing the Old Testament prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 of the King who comes in the power of God but with humility, to bring peace to the nations.

Jesus comes as his kind of King, God's kind of King and his act of salvation will be like nothing anyone could possibly imagine.

Jesus comes in celebration, to shouts of acclaim from the crowd but soon another crowd, maybe even including some of the very same people, will call for his death and the release of a notorious criminal in his place.

Perhaps, in these two opposing calls of the people, we hear represented the two sides to the response to the question posed by the confused and bewildered people of the city – 'Who is this?'

Some respond at the time – 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee'; Jesus seems to be claiming his place as the Son of David, coming in the name of God, as he rides on the foal, or the donkey – or maybe both.

Later, as the story unfolds, the religious leaders will ask Jesus if he is the Messiah, the Son of God and the Roman governor Pilate will ask him if he is the King of the Jews.

Some people respond to who this Jesus is or might be, with welcome and rejoicing. Others respond with fear and rejection, which will ultimately lead to his betrayal, trial and death – Palm Sunday and the Second Sunday of the Passion rolled into one in this coming, this Jesus, this God/Man – offered for us, for love of us.

I don't know how you respond to the question 'Who is this?' when thinking about Jesus. You may be listening to this as a person of faith, or not; you may be feeling reassured by an understanding of the faithfulness of God through history that sustains you in these present, challenging and bewildering times or you may be feeling uncertain, challenged, alone, scared and anxious because life and all you've known so far, seem to be in turmoil and constantly changing.

For me, this story speaks of a God who came in Jesus, doing things God's way and in great power – not the power of physical brute force, or domination, or imposition but the greater power of all-embracing love, and self-sacrifice, and offering.

This God can come to each of us afresh this Palm Sunday. Wherever we are, whoever we are, whatever has happened before, Jesus only asks that we notice his coming, welcome him in and seek to find out a little more of who he really is – for all of us in the 'crowd'; families, friends, neighbours, communities, nations, countries and the whole world. And yet, at the same time, God in Jesus comes to and for each one of us as individuals. We all matter to God, and in this 'Palm Sunday coming' in Jesus, and in the self-offering that is to come on 'Good Friday', we can see just how much.

PRAYER:

Loving, self-giving God,  
on this Palm Sunday – you come again to me, to us...

Help us to notice your coming,  
to seek to know more of you and your love for us...

May we and the wider world,  
see in you something that speaks of love, and hope, and kindness...

Hosanna to the Son of David.  
Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest heaven. AMEN.