

Palm Sunday Isa 52:7-12, Ps 118:1-2, 19-end, Mark 11:1-18

How should we celebrate Palm Sunday?

Instinctively I feel that it ought to be a celebration. God's King is coming to his holy city and reclaiming the temple as our OT reading promised he would.

The crowds welcomed him with shouts of praise.

They waved branches and laid their outer garments on the road for his mule to walk over as they would welcome a king [2 Kings 9:13]. They were calling out

Hosanna to the Son of David

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Yes we know that in less than a week another crowd would be shouting "Crucify". But on Palm Sunday the Disciples would be elated at the praise being directed at Jesus. They could see that the ordinary people supported Him. The crowds were delighted that Jesus had come to the Passover feast. Jesus' disciples were committed to following him.

Yes they knew that Jesus' life was in danger - the Jewish leaders were plotting to kill Him.

And for the last 6 months Jesus had been telling His disciples about His coming suffering and warning them that they too would have to take up their cross to follow Him. Despite that we don't see in the Gospels that they had really understood.

On Palm Sunday they were caught up in the celebration. They were travelling up to Jerusalem for the great festival. It was Passover. The crowd climbing the steep road from Jericho with Jesus had just seen Jesus heal blind Bartimaeus, who had joined in the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. As they drew near to Bethphage and Bethany the excitement would grow. The groups of pilgrims would be singing special pilgrim psalms.

As they rounded the hill from Bethsage they would see the afternoon sun shining on the white walls of Jerusalem like gold.

The city would already have been filling up with people who have arrived earlier. John's gospel (12:13) tells us that the crowds already in Jerusalem

heard that Jesus was on his way and went out to meet him carrying Palm Branches [John 12:12].

They gave him a royal welcome.

We don't know if Jesus had made a previous arrangement with an agreed sign to borrow the colt or if he had supernatural knowledge of it. Jesus did many miracles but we don't need to look for miracles in every event. He sent two disciples to bring the Colt for the final leg of the journey.

I understand that this would be a mule a cross between a female donkey and a horse.

When I lived on a cattle ranch for five years in Paraguay I sometimes rode a mule, the colt of a donkey. Especially if I had to do a lot of travelling, inspecting fences or making maps.

Mules walk quickly and gave a nice smooth ride.

Moving at the same speed on a horse would be at a trot and that is very bouncy, bone shaking.

But the cowboys didn't like mules because they were no good for rounding up cattle.

A horse is much more responsive to turn quickly, to stop or to speed ahead when herding cattle.

Jesus rode on the colt of a donkey. If there is a miracle here it is that the Colt which had not been ridden before carried Jesus through a shouting crowd waving palm branches and throwing branches and clothes in the path under its feet.

That Colt co-operated with Jesus purpose.

Jesus would have known the prophecy from OT prophet Zechariah [9:10]

**“Do not be afraid, O daughter of Zion;
See, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey's colt.”**

Jesus didn't ride because he was tired.

He was a strong active young man in his prime and used to walking. Choosing to ride in on a Donkey's colt was a deliberate choice to make a statement.

For three years Jesus had been very cautious not to disclose who he was. But now he is deliberately fulfilling Zechariahs' prophecy.

Jesus came to Jerusalem as their King.

A King coming to fight or to lead an army would have ridden a strong and responsive war horse.

Jesus came as King of peace to rescue His people. Jesus and his disciples and the crowd from Galilee were coming up to celebrate the feast of Passover. This feast to remembered God's stepping in to rescue his people from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt.

About 1,250 year before Jesus' birth Moses had given the word of the Lore to Pharaoh. "Let the Israelites leave Egypt so that they could worship The Lord their God." There was an epic struggle between the power of the Lord our God and the gods of Egypt and the Nile before Pharaoh agreed to let them go. They didn't have to fight their way out; they were delivered by God's power.

Moses led the people of Israel across the Red Sea to the mountain where they were given the law of God. But the climax of the book of Exodus was not the giving of the law in chapter 20 but the construction of the tabernacle.

The Tabernacle and the Temple that replaced it was the place where God's presence would dwell amongst His people. The Tabernacle was where heaven and earth would come together as God always intended. It was where God's space and Man's space came together

Why did Jesus choose the Passover festival to work out His plan of salvation? The Temple in Jerusalem was no longer serving the purpose it was intended for. It was no longer the place where heaven and earth meet, where people could come to meet with God.

In his preaching and teaching Jesus had presented himself as the real place where people can meet God. In Jesus people find the truth about what God is like, healing, forgiveness and a renewed vocation to serve as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus announced the coming of God's Kingdom. He was proclaiming that The Lord our God was at last overthrowing the dark powers that enslaved his people.

By coming to Jerusalem Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy from our OT reading of The Lord promising to return to His temple in Jerusalem.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news who says in Zion, "Your God Reigns... for they see the return of the Lord to Zion" [Isaiah 52:7-12].

When Jesus drove out the traders from the temple it was not just to denounce corruption or commercialism [Mark 11:12-18].

He was showing that the Temple was no longer serving the purpose for which it was built.

Israel's God had returned to his people as promised. But as St John tell us "**He came to His own but His own received Him not**" [John 1:11]. The Temple was a beautiful building but like a fig tree with not fruit.

Like Moses Jesus had come to confront and defeat the dark powers that hold people captive. Just as with Pharaoh in the first Exodus this would inevitably involve a clash, a battle.

All through His ministry, since His Baptism, Jesus had been waging a running battle with Satan and the dark forces of evil. Casting out evil spirits and setting people free from all that bound them. Jesus was not announcing a new theory or religion. He came to bring about a change. To ransom his people and lead them out of slavery to sin.

At the first Passover Yahweh, The Lord, Israel's God overcame the power of Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and opened the Red Sea so that His people could pass in safety free to worship God and enjoy the Promised Land under God's Rule.

But how would Jesus' victory be won? What had to happen for the dark powers to be defeated? What was needed was a new Exodus.

Why did Jesus died on the cross? Because the Romans Authorities, the corrupted Jewish leadership and the dark forces of evil behind them wanted to keep their power. They wanted to get rid of Jesus God's Saviour. To stop God's plan of Salvation.

Satan did not know that the death of the innocent one going willingly to die on behalf of the people would break the power and Sin and death. It would overthrow all the dark powers that had kept not only Israel but also the whole human race in captivity. By His death on the Cross in our place Jesus delivered us from the power of Sin and death.

The goodness and power of God had already been displayed, close up and dramatically in what Jesus had already done in His healing and teaching.

On the Cross Jesus won the decisive victory. Through His victory not just Israel but also the whole world would be liberated: ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven.

At the centre of this whole picture from the Gospels we do not find a wrathful God demanding that someone be punished, demanding blood. **No** we find the image of the covenant-keeping God who takes away the full force of sin onto himself.

On Palm Sunday Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem as King. How do we welcome Him into our lives?

Believing is not just a matter of words alone. It is no use to call Jesus "Lord" unless we pay attention to what He teaches [Luke 6:46]. When Jesus taught his disciples, "If you love me your will keep my commandments" [John 14:15] it was in the context of his continuing presence with us. Jesus is not looking for some rules based perfection - That was what the Pharisees called for. Jesus wants a love relationship with us To love the Lord our God with all we are and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

The Christian faith is a life to live.
As we live and worship we show what we really believe.

PRAYER

Father God, may we have the joy of those who travelled up to Jerusalem with Jesus. May we know your living presence with us, we see you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen