

## Palm Sunday 2020

Every year we celebrate Palm Sunday which is the beginning of holy Week. Over the years some of us have been a part of some kind of parade- waving palms or carrying a cross through the streets of where we live. For others this is a strange thing to do. But somehow we seek to hold the celebration of Jesus entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey with the pain and grief that occurs later in the week. Yet the week ends in the victory of life over death.

Perhaps that is why there is such a strange mix of feelings around Easter.

It is made even more difficult for us this year with the Covid 19 virus. We can not be a part of a procession or even imagine ourselves as part of a crowd. We can't even join together with others in worship so the joy of the celebration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is even further away.

This year we hear the entry to Jerusalem from the gospel of Matthew and we immediately come across a problem. You see Matthew has Jesus sending the disciples ahead to get a donkey and her colt. Then Matthew has Jesus ride on both of them at the same time which of course doesn't make sense. But for Matthew, Jesus was the fulfilment of the Jewish law and Matthew's audience was mainly Jewish so his entry on the donkey and colt was to fulfil a prophesy in Zechariah.

Interestingly the only gospel that mentions palms is the gospel of John. The other gospels have people placing their cloaks and branches down on the ground. Yet somehow, over the years the palms have been identified most with this day. Palms are an important plant in Jewish history and ritual. They were used for the Feast of the Tabernacles in September- but strangely John has them here at Passover in April. Maybe John is trying to get everyone to think more deeply about who Jesus truly is.



So, a few things for you about Palm Sunday. Jesus came riding on a donkey as a sign of peace. To come riding on a stallion or large horse would have been a sign of war. The people, some of whom had been following Jesus, were the ones to place their cloaks and branches down on the ground as a sign of welcome. Interestingly many other people seemed to join those who had been following Jesus.

The gospel of John does not have the disciples sent ahead to get the donkey. While the bible we have was translated from the Greek, the word 'Hosanna' is in fact a Hebrew word meaning 'saved'.

So here we have Jesus coming in gently and humbly into the city of Jerusalem. Ready for the final scenes of the story we have been following in Lent.

We have heard of his power through the miracles of a healed blind man, his compassion and power to raise Lazarus from the dead. We have heard of his wisdom and discernment when dealing with the Samaritan woman at the well, and the conversation with Nicodemus. And now we come to the celebration that is bitter sweet for us as we have heard the full story and we know what is coming.

If we have been watching our tvs or listening to radio or reading newspapers we are very aware of what has been happening in the world. And it is frightening. Staying at home and not being allowed to be with the people we want to be with is both frustrating and lonely. Not having the freedom we have in Australia that we are used to is strange. Yet in other countries there is no opportunity to have 'social or physical' distancing. Too many people live close together. Many

don't have the medical resources we have. Many don't have water to wash hands with nor the money to buy had sanitiser. Many don't even have the capacity to buy decent food let alone eat it. And we know what is potentially coming.

It is not easy, this journey of life, as there are so many difficult things which can happen and we are trying to live through something no one has lived through before. But there is one thing I am even more sure of- God is with us and there is no one better to understand what we go through in life than the one who has known joy and suffering.

I think it is the Philippians reading that speaks to us all- to have the mind of Christ in all things. Knowing that one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

My prayer for you this holy week is to stop, and think about the amazing love God has for us- every single one of us, and for all people- even when we do wrong. We still live with the consequences of our actions but always with the knowledge that God is leading us onwards and transforming our lives for the better. May you stop and think about this bittersweet journey of life- as we travel together with Jesus in our lives.

