

Palm Sunday, 13 April 2025

Liturgy of the Palms:

Luke 19.28-40, Psalm 118.1-2,19-29

Liturgy of the Passion:

Isaiah 50.4-9a, Psalm 31.9-16, Philippians 2.5-11 Luke 22.14 - 23.56

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19.14)

I realise I am predisposed to one-liners as they often capture the essence of something or other. I am aware of using a few over the last weeks “When you are living in unforgiveness someone else has control of your mind” or “I believe in God, even when he is silent.” Or as in this week’s email, “Whoever I am, you know, O God, I am yours.”

I will add one as it relates directly to our keeping of Palm Sunday, “He, Jesus, rode straight into the heart of centuries old prophecy.” It is worth repeating in case you missed it, “Jesus rode straight into the heart of centuries old prophecy” as he rode into Jerusalem. His riding into Jerusalem was foretold, prepared, and fulfilled. It was deliberate. It was on purpose, as we were reminded during the reading of Luke’s account of Jesus’ Passion, when he directs two of the disciples to fetch a colt. Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem is fulfilling a prophecy from Book of the Prophet Zechariah (9.9):

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

How does he come? He comes in humility! He enters Jerusalem riding on a colt that has never been ridden. The humility of which Zechariah speaks, which Jesus embodies is carried forward by Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians:

Though he was in the form of God...
he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross. (Philippians 2. 5-9)

The hymn the Servant King by Graham Kendrick did a good job of catching something of the contrast of this new king, whose earthly ministry comes to shape and characterise the ministry of each and every Christian, as he or she seeks to fulfil their vocation as a member of God's new creation. In the Servant King written in 1983 we are presented with memorable word pictures:

Come, see His hands and His feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

We return to the theme of this sermon. On that first Palm Sunday, Jesus didn't only ride into Jerusalem to face the authorities religious and political, but also importantly he rode straight into the heart of centuries old prophecy as recorded in the the Hebrew Scriptures our Old Testament, Testament meaning Covenant. At the Good Friday ecumenical service we will remind ourselves of how Jesus' last days in Jerusalem again and again fulfil Scripture, are shaped by the Writings he knew and often referenced. Did Jesus control what was happening or did it just happen to him? Jesus' witness are the Writings. They testify impressively that he is the Messiah plus. He is the Promised One plus.

In the Lent groups we learnt or became aware of anew that Jesus in John's gospel refers to three witnesses. (John 5.30-end) The first witness is John the Baptist. The second is the works of God he is doing and the third is the Scriptures a witness the

critics cannot avoid and is a primary source for all Christians being a faithful testimony as Luke writes,

“Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ... I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.” (Luke 1.1-4)

For a few, maybe some, even many the time for being puzzled should be drawing to a close. What do I mean? There comes a time when we are to put our trust in God, as Jesus does, not only in the Garden of Gethsemane but also on and from the cross. The Psalm (Psalm 22) that begins with the shattering words, “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me” and records the the horror wreaked on Jesus as in these verses

“Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce[d] my hands and my feet.
All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.” Psalm 22.16-18

ends by affirming faith in God and what will be accomplished through God. Listen.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

That is how Psalm 22 ends. Here Jesus is following Jewish tradition whereby the part of a quoted psalm stands for the whole. Jesus has in mind the whole psalm,

culminating in faith and confidence in God. I provided an example forged in adversity in the 1940s last week, “I believe in God, even when he is silent.”

As the people cried, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” they were quoting from a psalm - a psalm of victory, a psalm of deliverance, a psalm of God’s faithful love. Psalm 118 speaks of a stone that the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone. It points to a Saviour who will be done away with and it is this man Jesus, the one who is rejected who is the foundation of a new kingdom not made with hands.” He is Hosanna. He is the one who saves. Hosanna which we think of as a word of praise means save, save us!

May we in solidarity with all who confess Christ crucified and risen, then and now, lay down our cloaks before him. These cloaks represent us, as we put our trust in God and lay before him our hardness of heart, our indifference, our lies, our pride, or despair, our negativity, our self-centredness and our fears that we might be transformed. As Jesus rides into the heart of centuries old prophecy may the gates of our hearts be open to receive him who is close to the Father’s heart, Ichthus, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. **Amen.**

Source for Psalm. 22: John Dover: *The Words of the Crucified*. London, Epworth Press, pp,33-4.