

Reflection for Palm Sunday. Matthew 21

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The tension is rising, we have been following Jesus' journey as He comes to Jerusalem and now the time has come when He is about to enter the city. Jesus has been warned against returning to this great Temple city. He knows that the High priests and those around them are looking for a way to do away with Him, to end the possibility of disruption to their way of life. They may be afraid that Jesus will lead a revolt that would be put down in a bloody fashion by the Romans, just when they have got things sorted to give themselves an easy existence. Jesus is not going to enter Jerusalem quietly, He is not going to slip in by the back door, even if He wanted to, there is already a crowd waiting for Him filled with excitement and joy. What were they, the crowd, expecting? Were they hoping for a King David style of leader to sweep away the oppressors?

Jesus, as ever in control of the situation, sends his disciples to fetch a donkey. He tells them to go into a street and there they will find a donkey complete with a colt tied up to a door. They are questioned as to why they are taking the donkey; their reply is simply that the Lord has need of it and the donkey is released to them. This is extraordinary, the donkey would have been the equivalent of somebody's van, a workday vehicle, but they are content to let it go. 'Fine just take it'.

For His part, Jesus chooses an everyday means of entering Jerusalem in triumph. Not for Him a dashing white charger or a magnificent carriage, instead a humble donkey - a first century equivalent of a transit pick up! The crowds are ecstatic, waving branches, throwing their cloaks on the road in front of Jesus, cheering and waving. So that the whole city is in turmoil, 'who is this?' they ask. 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee,' Jesus is certainly creating a stir. The crowds are filled with expectation, 'what is going to happen now?' they must be asking themselves.

Jesus enters the Temple and chases out the traders from the courts of the Temple, turning over the tables of the money changers, all those who short change the visitors to the Temple. Jesus says, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a place of prayer'; but you are making it a den of thieves."

One would have expected the temple police and security guards to have come rushing at the sound of this turmoil. If the shop in Exeter Cathedral had such an event they would have come rushing in from every direction, instead nothing. Jesus seemingly just goes off to Bethany for tea.

There exists this tension, the Chief Priests and Elders clearly disturbed and frightened by Jesus' authoritative presence but also scared of the reaction of the crowd. The population of Jerusalem is swelled by pilgrims who are there for the feast of the Passover. The atmosphere is electric; the Roman Garrison has moved troops from Caesarea to be on hand just in case. The last thing the Chief Priests want is for the Temple to be defiled by the presence of Gentile soldiers. So, they plot ways to rid themselves of Jesus.

*Merciful God, as we enter Holy week,
turn our hearts again to Jerusalem,
and to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Stir up within us the gift of faith
that we may not only praise him with our lips,
but may follow him in the way of the cross.
Father God, send us out into Holy Week
commending all whom we meet,
for whom Christ suffered, to your mercy and protection.
Amen*