

Palm Sunday Reflection: Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." ⁴This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵"Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd^[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Reflection

Can you visualise the city of Jerusalem? It is hilly country around it. To the east stretches the desert... most pilgrims – like Jesus and his disciples- came from the east, climbing up from Jericho and the Jordan Valley to the poor villages of Bethphage and Bethany where Jesus stayed with Mary and Martha and raised their brother Lazarus from the dead... then they climbed over the Mount of Olives and saw that amazing view of the Walled city and the Temple of Jerusalem. To the west stretches a flat, productive plain away toward the Mediterranean. From the west side of the city the Roman legions would march in; rank upon rank in a disciplined order to increase the Garrison at Festival times like Passover when the Romans might expect trouble.

So here we are... the stage is set for the clash of the Powers.... Jesus comes as the people's King with a dancing, singing crowd – lead by children who the bible notes were the most voiciferous – and the Kingdoms of this World; the Roman Governor and the Religious authorities.

Its really quite a comical scene – the Roman marching in from the west in their disciplined ranks, armoured centurions on horseback.... And Jesus from the east on a young donkey heralded by a singing crowd of common folk waiving palm branches and laying down dusty cloaks for him to walk over. The religious leaders staring in disbelief and FEAR that the whole situation is getting out of hand.

What about Jesus? Go away and read this account for yourselves in all 4 gospels (we have the time now in lockdown!) and I am struck by his calmness... everything is planned and intentional... right

down to where they will find and untie the donkey. Why did he use a donkey? Because several hundred years before the prophet Zechariah had foretold:

“Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

In his account, the apostle John writes: “¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.” Only afterwards did they see and understand.

How was Jesus so calm and intentional, knowing the horrors he would face in the week ahead? I think the secret lies on the Mount of Olives. This is the place, on the hill overlooking the city, where he retreated to pray and reflect... much earlier in John’s gospel (chapter 8) we find him there before his showdown with the Pharisees and the woman taken in adultery.. a tiny clue in a single verse; ‘Then each went to his own home. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.’

It is from here that he weeps over the city where he has come to die... and on Thursday night we will find him here wrestling in prayer prior to his arrest..... ‘Father if possible, let this cup be taken from me, but not my will but thine be done’.

My question is.... In this OUR troubled time, amidst the media storm and the growing fear... where is our Mount of Olives? the quiet place we Retreat to – to connect with our heavenly Father and restore a sense of peace and purpose. It cannot now be our church buildings for they are closed to us..... but each of us can create a quiet corner and intentional time-out as Jesus did.

As a child, I had a quiet corner in my bedroom with a cross and a picture, at University the back of my door was covered with images and texts which helped me pray. Now I have cleared our cellar and hung a simple wood cross on its bare white walls. For you it maybe outside... a corner of your garden or an armchair with a view. Wherever it is... make time this week to be still and know that God is with you and will guide you through the challenges we face, whatever they are... just as he was with Jesus.

“Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.” (Psalm 46:10-11)