

Palm Sunday

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There is a human saying, “if you want peace, prepare for war.” In human terms this seems to make sense but only to a point, because the kind of peace that is thought of here is actually control. We human beings like to be able to control that which is around us, it makes us feel safe. The trouble is, the power or influence we believe we have, the more that we desire to control – the more we prepare for war to protect our own ‘peace.’ We only have to look at the interplay between nations and world leaders to see the truth of this which is most clearly displayed in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

We come today to the story Palm Sunday,
a story of peace and war,
a story of welcome and rejection,
and a story of openness and control.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is a powerful moment in his earthly life. He has come to the capital, to the centre of cultural, civil and religious life for the Jewish people. He deliberately rides a donkey as he enters the city so that it can be clearly and symbolically seen that he comes to the centre of his nation and people in peace. The religious leaders are increasingly troubled by him because they cannot control him. We have been reading some of these encounters in the gospel passages through Lent. Their perceived power holds no sway over him and every time they try to undermine his following, they are left looking foolish, so they plot to destroy him. We hear this today in the full liturgy of Palm Sunday where we read of his entry into Jerusalem [Matthew 21.1-11] and his passion and death [Matthew 26.14-27.56].

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is welcomed by the crowd. They “*spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.*” [Matt 21.8] Then they sang “*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*” [Matt 21.9] This is a moment of hope and promise where Jesus is recognised. The fickleness of this hopeful crowd is seen in less than a week when the same crowd stand before Pilate and shout “*Let him be crucified!*” [Matt 27.22] Their rejection of him is palpable. Are they turning on him because he didn’t fulfil their image of what he should be? Maybe. Are they following the leadership of those in power who want rid of this threat to their stability and self-perceived authority? Probably. Whatever the reasons, the crowd quickly turn from welcome to rejection.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is his openness to all that he knew needed to happen. Before he arrives in Jerusalem he speaks this prediction to his disciples: *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised."* [Matt 20.18-19] The religious leaders do exactly as he says, they manipulate the situation so that Pilate, the Gentile Governor, will give the order for crucifixion. They thought they had him controlled, but in reality Jesus openness to the Father's will and his love for humanity allowed his self-sacrifice in the cross for the sins of all humanity.

We began with a human saying. What Jesus has given us in the events of his entry into Jerusalem and his passion is what we might call a divine saying that rewrites our limited thinking into God's thinking: *"If you want peace, give sacrificially of yourself for the sake of others. This is love, and only in this way will peace find you!"*

May God's love revealed in Jesus' self-sacrifice on the cross lead us along the way to peace.

