

Palm Sunday 2021

St Mary's

Mark 11:1-11

The account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem from Bethphage and Bethany and then down the Mount of Olives is recorded in all four Gospels and as you would expect they all have a slightly different emphasis and record different details. Any account of an incident, told by different eyewitnesses will differ, and the Gospels were written after hearing the accounts of many many witnesses. However, the different overall emphasis that comes through in each of the Gospels is also deliberate. Written at different times by different people for different reasons and different audiences, each of the Gospel writers seeks to highlight a different aspect of the character of God. This is expounded brilliantly in a book called, *The Four Faces of God* by John Bickersteth and Timothy Pain. I highly recommend it to you, and we might even do a sermon series on it at some point. Matthew writes from the point of view of the Kingdom of God and the Kingship of Jesus, he wants his readers to obey their King, Luke, the Doctor and man of science knows that Jesus is God but emphasises His humanity, He is concerned to portray Jesus as our role model as the perfect man, John shows us the glory of Jesus as the Holy Son of God. This year we are looking at the Passion of Jesus, the story of His last days, His arrest, phony trial, execution, and glorious resurrection from the perspective of Mark. Mark was writing originally for a Jewish audience and he shows us Jesus as the suffering servant, foretold in old testament prophecy. He reveals the humility of Jesus, the Son of God who came to serve and to save His people.

All the elements are there, Jesus entry into Jerusalem undoubtedly looks like the arrival of a King, riding in peace on a young donkey, with people laying down their cloaks and branches cut from the fields on the ground before Him.

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The fact that the colt, the young donkey had never been ridden before is important, it has been set aside for a Holy purpose, for the King to be the first to ride it. It had no saddle, that is why the disciples laid their cloaks on it for Jesus to sit on. This would infer that it was unbroken. Normally any animal that has never been ridden before, unless already trained in some way would object to a man sitting on its back. A small detail, easily overlooked, but another indication of Jesus's quiet command and authority over all creation.

Unlike Matthew, Luke and John, Mark plays down the size of the crowd, for him it is the lowliness and humility of Jesus' entry into the city that is important, not its triumphal nature. Jesus' Kingship is one of hidden majesty, of humble power to save. The crowd is shouting words from Psalm 118, the last of the Hallel or praise psalms that were recited in synagogues on festive occasions and especially at the three Pilgrim Sacrifices. Hosanna, has come to be an expression of praise, but originally **is** meant, God save us, or God save us now! 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' was an expression of welcome at the time, priests especially would use it to welcome people into the Temple. The phrase of particular importance here is, "Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David". This refers to the coming reign of the Messiah. How much did the people really understand the significance of what they were shouting? Jesus had revealed to the disciples and those closest to Him that He was the Messiah, the coming King. How much the crowd around Him were aware that they were welcoming the coming King and how much they were just caught up in the moment we really can't tell, and it doesn't matter. Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem was both the fulfilment of prophecy and in itself a prophetic act. The King was arriving to claim His Kingdom, but it was no earthly Kingdom won by a temporal battle. He was

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coming to fight the ultimate spiritual battle against all evil, sin and death and to take His place on the throne of the eternal Kingdom of God. Not even His closest friends could even begin to understand how this would happen or what it would mean. It would quite literally mean spiritual life or death to each one of them and to each one of us!

Jesus accepted the praises offered as he rode down the Mount of Olives, but He didn't respond, He made no grand speeches, He didn't even comment. Lamar Williamson reflects that we need to be clear about the grandeur of the divine lowliness that Jesus displayed. It is important he says, because we tend to become like the God, or gods that we worship. We don't want to become part of a fickle crowd, but by the grace of a crucified and risen Lord, we need to continue to follow Him and come to share, in some measure, His lowliness and His strength.

And that is something for us to reflect on during Holy Week. As we look forward to rejoicing in our risen Lord and saviour next Sunday, how are we going to prepare our hearts to receive Him again? Although we cannot even begin to understand the price He paid, the suffering He endured for each one of us, it is helpful to at least remember the events, to try in some sense to walk the road, to reflect on what it all means. To try to honestly answer some hard questions about how far we will really go to follow Him. Are we really prepared to humble ourselves as He humbled Himself? Are we really prepared to die to ourselves and our selfish desires, to truly live for Christ and for others? Or do we just want a comfortable religion, that tells us that everything is ok. Do we just want Easter Sunday, bypassing the cross on Good Friday? Are we looking for the glory without paying the cost? What is the cost, for you, of following Jesus, our servant King?