

Palm Sunday 2020 – CV3 Churchathome GLBC – who is he?

Introduction:

Welcome to week three of 'churchathome'. Just as a heads up, I think it would be lovely to have communion next Sunday to celebrate Easter together, so if you'd like to join in with that, please make sure you have some bread and a red drink (wine if you do drink, red grape juice or alternative if you don't) ready for next Sunday. This week, though, we're thinking about Jesus entering Jerusalem in the last week of his life.

Ideas for sung worship to listen to or join in with:

It would be good to use some of the more traditional hymns for this week, like 'Ride on, ride on in majesty', 'Rejoice the Lord is King' or 'All hail the Power of Jesus Name'. The mood of the crowd was very celebratory (unlike some of our hymns!) so singing cheerful choruses like 'Hosanna, Hosanna', 'You are crowned with many crowns' or 'He is exalted' would fit in very well. We need to find the balance between the truths that Jesus is king and that the path to his coronation with the crown of thorns was one of humility and pain. We are living in a time of pain and confusion and to sing praise today may feel like a sacrifice. God knows and honours that. If today you feel more like mourning, perhaps you would prefer to listen to the hymn 'man of sorrows', though it is more commonly sung on Good Friday.

Ideas for prayer:

This week is Holy Week. I'm hoping Pete and I will be able to work quickly enough to get materials on line for Thursday, Friday and Saturday as well as Easter Day. Please pray that we will be able to do our part well and cooperate with each other so that those who need materials posted to them can receive them in time. Pray as well as we work with the team from Delves to put joint worship together.

Pray for those in the Holy Land who will see a ruinous drop in income this year as no tourists or pilgrims are able to visit Jerusalem, Bethlehem and other holy sites. For the decreasing number of Arab Christians, this could be the thing that forces them to leave the homeland of their ancestors.

Pray for Christians for whom meeting in secret or being isolated secret believers at home is their every day experience. Pray for courage, patience and hope. Be thankful for our liberty to worship openly and for all the means we have to stay in touch even if we cannot go out.

Pray for John's Pastoral group this week; Joseph and Joy A, with Joseph, Oghosa and Godpower, Sarah B, Barbara and Georgina H, Jenny H, Ann and Bryan J, Kate J and Emma J, Gwen M, Marcia and David M and Fred S.

Think of things this week you can thank God for: shelter, food, running water, systems to try to protect the vulnerable, still having choices, natural beauty, all sorts of things! Pray for those you know who do not have those choices and who are struggling with heat, light, water or food supplies.

If you are a family at home together you might draw a tree trunk, then all draw round your spread hands to make palm fronds on the tree trunk. You could write a different person or thing to pray for, or a different person or thing to thank God for in each finger/frond and then colour the tree in!

Bible teaching:

The passage we are thinking about this week is Matthew 21:1-11 and the text will be in the youtube comments if you don't have a Bible to hand. This is the start of Holy Week, leading to our most important festival. It is set during the time when Jesus and other Jews were preparing to celebrate their greatest festival too, that of Passover. This explains why Jesus was heading to Jerusalem with his followers. Passover was one of the three annual festivals where Jewish men were required to go to the Temple to worship.

The angle we are looking at the passage from is taken from the end of the passage. 'Who is he?' We will look for the clues to Jesus identity given in the passage and think about what we additionally know because of later events. Our translation slightly covers up the first clue. In verse 3, it uses the word 'master', but the literal translation is 'lord'. Jesus is secure in his identity and so requisitions use of the animals. It may be a prior arrangement; certainly Jesus had walked through Bethphage any number of times. However, using the word 'lord' is a cue for what follows.

Matthew says Jesus rides the unbroken (previously unriden) colt in order to fulfil prophecy. Then he joins together words from Isaiah and Zechariah. Jesus controls the untrained young animal. As with the calming of the storm, it shows his authority over nature. The riding of a donkey had been done previously by kings of Israel to demonstrate coming in peace. In a week of heightened emotions, those anticipating a messiah who would be political and overthrow the Romans would have read this sign with dismay if they also interpreted the other signs to identify Jesus as the messiah. Zechariah speaks of the humble nature of the one who is to come. Riding this animal identified Jesus, to those who could read the signs, as a humble, peace bringing king.

The actions of the crowd demonstrate that at least some of them recognised the significance of Jesus riding. Nowhere else is Jesus ever shown doing anything other than walk. In response to his mounting the colt, some from the crowd who had probably also travelled from the north threw their cloaks onto the path – something done earlier in the nation's history to welcome the king to Jerusalem. They also cut branches to wave, echoing something that happened when the Maccabean rebellion overthrew foreign invaders and cleansed the temple. The crowd were expecting overthrowing of invaders and a new cleansing of the temple. The cry 'hosanna' (translated as 'praise' by our version) was about God bringing salvation. The signs are there. People in the crowd saw Jesus not just as a king, but as a saviour.

This is most clearly announced by the cry 'Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.' The title Son of David was one that identified the messiah. This was not any old king, it was not any old prophet, it was the prophet, priest and king they were waiting for. For the people in the city, who had not experienced much of the ministry of Jesus, it is no wonder these claims caused uproar. The crowd were shouting that the king was coming, that the anointed one was coming. They were announcing that everything was about to change. The man they were shouting about, though, confounded popular expectations by coming as one bringing peace, not a sword.

When you are asked 'who is he?' does Jesus match your expectations or confound you? Have you firm ideas in your head of what God should be like, or what God should do, that in fact he does not? What kind of welcome do you offer him, when he rides towards your gates?

For Junior Church:

Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem. He wasn't just with his friends though. A whole crowd were journeying together for the festival of Passover. They needed to get there in time to be ready to celebrate. Everyone was excited and looking forward to remembering how God had saved their people, rescued them from slavery and given them a land of their own.

Jesus always walked everywhere, but when they got close to the village of Bethphage, he said to two of his friends, "go into the village. You will see a donkey with her colt. Bring them to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, say to them 'The Lord needs them'." His friends were quite surprised. Why did Jesus want a young donkey now? Had he arranged this in advance? Would they be accused of stealing?

They brought the animals back to Jesus without any trouble and when they realised Jesus was going to ride the colt people in the crowd had different reactions. Some people thought, 'if this donkey has never been ridden, how will Jesus stay on it?' Other people thought how uncomfortable it would be and put their cloaks on to the young donkey. Some people remembered that King David had come into Jerusalem from the same area, they also knew that the prophet Zechariah had said that God's chosen one, the messiah, would come as a humble king.

Whispers went around the crowd. People had seen Jesus performing miracles back in Galilee. They had heard him teaching that God's kingdom was among them. Some people had already put two and two together and knew Jesus was their promised king and would save the people of Israel again. Some people were unsure – wouldn't a king come with an army to get rid of the Romans?

But the crowd got more and more excited, they started to lay their cloaks on the road and pulled fronds off the palm trees to wave like flags. Instead of a pilgrimage, it felt more like a victory parade. They shouted praise to God for the coming of the rightful king – "hosanna – God save us", "hosanna to the Son of David", "Blessed is the one who comes in God's name". They made so much noise celebrating, that the religious rulers of the city came out to meet them. "Who is he?" they asked. The crowd answered back, "He is Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee."