

## **Palm Sunday CTM Parish. March 2018**

St Margaret's Mapledurham.

Matthew 21: 1-3

So, here's the thing.

The really big question:

Do you think he had everything under control that day he rode into Jerusalem?

Was it all orchestrated, do you think?

The tethered donkey, the crowd, the cloaks, the branches?

A very big part of me wants to think so –

because I want to proclaim Him from the rooftops – I'd love the whole world to acknowledge Him as Lord and King.

But I'm not sure He did have it all under control, that day.

Martin Israel –

a consultant psychiatrist and Anglican priest – sadly now dead - said this,

He said that if Jesus had known,

with absolute certainty, that the Father would raise Him upon the third day,

then all this – palm Sunday, the trial, the flogging and his death would all have been purely theatrical.

And that wouldn't have been enough for what He had to do.

Think about that this week.

And - His last words from the cross –

Eloi, eloi, lamma sabachthani –

My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?

That is God - separated from God;

Jesus - plumbing the darkest,

most hellish depths of atheism imaginable –

for you, and for me.

Jesus knew Jerusalem was a dangerous place –

but still, He went.

As He rode into the city,

the crowd going wild all around Him,

He knew He was loved,

but I wonder if He knew He'd be raised from the dead?

As He rode into the darkness I think He was no more clear in His mind than today was orchestrated.

The risk was – it could have all come to nothing.

And He took that risk – for you and for me.

And He calls us to follow.

Easy, really!

So, what's holding us back?

What's stopping us from following, - wholeheartedly?

Is it because we are too settled?

Because we are the established Church?

Or is it because we are afraid to take the next step - until we can see the future,

clearly mapped out ahead of us?

Is that why we don't take any risks for Him, anymore?

The Californian signs and wonders preacher,

John Wimber used to say –

'Faith' is spelt RISK.

What are we prepared to risk for Him?

Our reputation?

The embarrassment of looking daft?

Of taking a fall?

Of getting it wrong?

All this begs another huge question:

what's stopping us being true to ourselves?

Is it because we can't believe we're enough?

Or because we can't believe we're truly loved?

Because if it is – any of those things –

then believe me –

this week is just for you – and for me.

## **St Peter's Caversham**

*Luke 19: 41-44*

Jesus wept!

That was often used as a profanity when I was at school.

And it always made me cringe.

Not that I was precious as a teenager

but I loved Him for it then - and still do, now, years later.

It IS slightly embarrassing though, isn't it?

Particularly in our culture.

Well, look at that!

There's Jesus - weeping over Jerusalem.

Well, He would, wouldn't He?

He is the Son of God.

Glad we can't see the future like that.

We'd more than just weep.

Yes! Glad we can't feel all the pain in the world, either.

Can't afford to, actually,  
especially if you've got a job to do!

Glad there are people who can weep, though –  
in monasteries and that.

But this story –  
isn't a story about what happened  
once upon a time; two thousand years ago.

It is a story about what *happens*  
All the time – between God and His creation.

Jesus didn't say,  
"Believe these things and you'll be saved"

He said, "Come, follow me."

Come with me – stay close!

Join in with as much as you can –

But – you'll be changed – as I was changed.

And here, well, what we are seeing is mercy – and compassion - the theme of this second station of our journey with Jesus –

And it is very much about relationship.

The difficulty I think we have

is that Church Latin –

which has powerfully shaped the way we talk about God

- has limited our understanding of mercy

to being something transactional.

Mercy is something I can show you –

if I have a mind to,

- if you do this.

But to the first century eastern mind,

mercy was much deeper and richer.

It was more like the coming together of two distinct streams –  
compassion and fidelity –

flowing into one another to form a mighty river –

A river of love and goodness,

which pours forth constantly

from the throne of God

- out into the world.

So whenever Jesus is merciful,

or He talks about mercy -

it is always so much more than a mere transaction.

For all sorts of reasons – actually

but in the Hebrew,

the word for compassion [rahamin]

assumes a deep attachment

between two people –

an attachment that comes from the heart –

and from deep in the gut.

So when Jesus looked at the rich young man,

He looked at him with compassion –

And in doing so, He joined himself to Him.

And when He looked at the crowd,

which was like sheep without a shepherd –

He was moved in the depth of his bowels –

Because He was one with them.

And as He rides into Jerusalem  
and sees the city, He weeps over it –  
because the city is in His heart.

The other stream - flowing into this great river - fidelity, also unites two  
people together  
in deep bonds of affection -  
that has everything to do with a conscious goodness, freely chosen –  
with no strings attached.

Whatever Jerusalem is about to do to Him -  
And He knows the city's reputation –  
Whatever it is about to do to Him,  
Jesus weeps over it – and enters it –  
Because it has already entered Him.

So, the question is:  
what is it about the world  
that gets under your skin?

What is it that cuts you to the quick?

What is it that breaks your heart about this community?

Those are the things we need to bring to the altar today –

they are the things that God will use to

stir us to action –

to be part of His ceaseless generous Outpouring.

## St John's Caversham

Luke 19: 37-40

This was **hardly** the invasion the zealots wanted.  
And it was nothing like a Roman Triumph.  
But the crowds loved Him for it.

He came with no national emblems or flags,  
just the palm branches that the crowd,  
loving Him, waved in the air,

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

He didn't come in a chariot – but on an **ass**.  
There were no red carpets,  
but the crowd showed they loved Him  
by spreading cloaks on the road.

The crowds loved Him and they praised Him  
Because they knew who He was  
in all the miracles they'd seen:  
Hosanna!  
Blessed is the King  
who comes in the name of the Lord!

But even miracles are forgotten in the face of danger - and it seems, they  
slunk away.

Mark tells us that,  
having arrived in the Temple courts,  
Jesus looked around at everything –

and, because it was already late -

Or because the crowd had already dispersed, perhaps ...? He headed back to Bethany.

So, was it the wrong time?

Or maybe the crowd wasn't quite ready for Him?

I might ask myself the same thing.

In the end, it didn't matter if they were ready, or not.

The stones would have cried out if the crowd hadn't!

All creation recognised Him and

as the darkness grew thicker,

He pressed on, into it.

You know what I think?

I think that

Before we join the crowds celebrating the Kingdom breaking in -

we need it to allow it break into our own lives.

Because - you and me?

Well, we are all Temples of the Holy Spirit -

places where God wishes to dwell.

Which is why today can be so excruciatingly painful - because you see,  
He comes to purify us,  
just as He came to purify the Temple.

With all my heart – today -  
I want to shout Hosanna!  
To welcome Him – right in here!

Hoping that when He comes  
He'll find one beautiful altar –  
deep inside me –  
dedicated to Him,  
the One, True God  
Where all the praises of my life rise from.

What I find so painful is  
I know what He is likely to find is more like a cathedral – inside - with lots  
of side chapels  
dedicated to all the godlets I have put my trust in since I was a young  
man:  
pride; vanity; fear.

Yes.  
It's painful to allow the Lord in to cleanse us.  
Because He may disabuse us of our self-delusions.

That is why the religious authorities hated Him.  
Think of it like this.....

Supposing I was rich  
and I owned what I thought was a beautiful old masterpiece I had  
inherited from my family.

Something I loved to show off to my friends from time to time.

And, one day, I dared to invite an expert from Christies into my home to take a look at it.

I'd be heartbroken if he told me the painting I loved wasn't an original at all,  
just a very good copy.

That's why they told him to shut the crowd up.

Because they knew what this was really about.

And it was painful.

He came to purify the Temple - where Israel's praise should have risen to heaven from -

But it had developed a religious system  
that was so embedded in its own rules  
and practices

it had stopped being open to **any** fresh call from God.

And He purified the Temple because -  
well - He is the reality to which the temple points.

His own body,  
so soon to be destroyed  
and then raised again -

is the true temple,  
a house of prayer for all nations.

He himself is the place where God's presence dwells among us.

Jesus, a person, not a building.

Flesh, blood and bone, not a place constructed by brick, stone and mortar.

However holy it is; however sacred.

And you don't get much more sacred than a Temple.

But there is real rejoicing too.

And I pray that with the crowd that day

**our** eyes will be opened

and we won't be able to stop ourselves shouting Hosanna –

Because we can see all that God is doing all around here.

The question is

how can we learn to point out what He's doing, as well as notice it?

And how might we do that more consistently, joyfully, and courageously as His people?

Hosanna!