

A Peaceful Invasion - Palm Sunday 2009

Mark 11:1-10 [Matt 21:1-11, Luke 19:28-42, John 12:12-16]

Psalms 118: 24 This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. 25 O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. 27 The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs (branches) in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. 28 You are my God, and I will give thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. 29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever

Zec 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Mark 11:1-1 The Triumphal Entry

Nar: As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them,

Jesus: Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no-one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'

Nar: They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked,

Person: What are you doing, untying that colt?

Nar: 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

All: **Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**
10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!

Nar: 11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

A Peaceful Invasion

- The empowerment of the ordinary people – the poor in spirit.

Let us imagine what it was like for a moment as God planned Palm Sunday...
I imagine him as an executive director of this 'happening'.

He has already inspired the psalmist to write the worship lyrics – Ps 118 and ensured that people know the words. And hinted at the props (branches).

He has prepared people for the event through the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9

Everyone in Jerusalem, celebrate and shout! Your king has won a victory, and he is coming to you. He is humble and rides on a donkey; he comes on the colt of a donkey.

He says to Jesus – ok when you are on earth gather the cast together and make it happen!

Let's just think then about the disciples for a minute -
The journey to Jerusalem has been very significant for them. They have been journeying for sometime – building relationships with one another and with Jesus and Jesus has been teaching them
I will be glorified – the disciples are getting ready for Jesus' glory. They didn't seem to have any concept about his forthcoming humiliation and death – probably because Jesus kept talking about his glory.... and the establishing of God's kingdom.

James and John certainly think that there is going to some glory to look forward to and have snuck up on Jesus and asked him – probably without the other disciples overhearing whether they can sit on the left and right hand side of Jesus in his glory. Jesus talks to them about baptism and cup and suffering and being a servant – which must have left James and John confused and out down.

So here they are coming into Jerusalem – nervous excitement mounting...
Perhaps Jesus sent some disciples to strip palm branches off palm trees, perhaps that was like getting flags ready..
This left 2 disciples – James and John? – wrestling with a donkey! [CF - Chuckle brothers??]
Is this what it means to share in Jesus' glory? Were they being taught about humility, servanthood, images of peace?
Already some of the expectations of the day are being challenged.

Cast of hundreds/thousands? God's got that sorted already – a big crowd in Jerusalem ready for the Passover – to celebrate their freedom from slavery.

All is ready - the stage is set – for an invasion!

Jesus is going to invade Jerusalem – this is the start of his glory – this'll make up for the slightly embarrassing donkey incident.

I don't know what you think of when you think of an invasion but it's probably not this. Jesus is turning it all on its head. The invasion of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday is a complete reversal of the violent invasions we know from history.

By riding into the centre of power on his donkey, surrounded by his crowd, Jesus is quietly making a statement. His peaceful invasion is making a statement to the Romans who are fearful of anyone challenging their authority and the religious leaders who are so threatened that someone might be questioning their understanding of God which they have so neatly and conclusively put in a box, and I think he is also making a statement to his disciples and others who are expecting God to do a replay of Exodus and free them from the Roman occupation.

But perhaps Jesus is doing something else here too. There is a whole cast of people that we almost overlook in the Palm Sunday story. The crowd. These appear to be the extras – the left over roles in the drama. The crowd – like the chorus - what happens to those who didn't make it into a real part.

But this peaceful invasion turns the role of the crowd upside down too.

Here they are the ones with the voice. In this scenario it is only the crowd, the chorus as it were who have any lines...

The crowd are the 'nobodies' – the crowd appear all through the gospels
Matt 21:8 – Crowd – not the powerful, included the outcast, the beggar, the sick – the poor in Spirit - this is who recognised that he was the King
Mark 11:8 – Many – Jesus has just used this same word in the last Chapter to explain who is he going to die for –

Mar 10:45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

It is these people for whom Jesus is going to die.

Jesus has already made it clear that it is the Poor in Spirit who will inherit the kingdom of God.

And here they are on Palm Sunday, humble enough to recognize their own neediness, happy to acknowledge that Jesus is greater than they are. It is not the Pharisees and the religious leaders who are acknowledging Jesus as King but the ordinary people.

Perhaps the day was about empowering the crowd – giving a voice to those who were crying out to be saved.

Hosanna – from the Hebrew literally means 'save us'.

I wonder who I am and who are you in the Palm Sunday Story?

Are we the Religious leaders?

According to Matt, Mark and Luke, then Jesus went to the Temple and there was no response. The religious leaders didn't recognize him – their minds seemed completely closed, he was too challenging. Are we like that now? Have we got everything so sorted out that we can not open our mind to God working in a different way from what we expect? What if God's plan for this generation was to reach out to Muslims, the gay community, travellers? How would we cope with the fact that they were culturally express their faith very differently from us, here in this place? I wonder if we have put God into a Western European box and we would be threatened if he got loose from it. This is the **challenge..**

Are we the disciples?

Are we confused by what God is doing and how he is doing it? For 3 years and particularly in the last few weeks or months as they journeyed to Jerusalem, Jesus has been going on and on about how he is going to be glorified, how he is going to bring glory to his father, how he is going to be exalted and lifted up. This is it? In some ways it must have been a complete anti-climax. Sometimes we don't understand how God's plans are fulfilled – the disciples had to hang in there for another week to really get a glimpse of what it meant for Jesus to be glorified.

Challenge

To join in with Jesus' peaceful invasion - One that recognizes the poor in spirit – the ordinary people who recognize their own neediness – the Kingdom of heaven is near.

Or are you the Crowd? Good News!

Maybe you feel like you are the crowd. You feel insignificant – you may already be a Christian or maybe you have been watching and listening from the sidelines. You are to be affirmed, you are valuable – Jesus wants to give you a voice – he died for you. Palm Sunday is good news!