

John 12: 12-16 **The Triumphal Entry**
PALM SUNDAY, March 24th, Grenoble

readings: Isaiah 50: 4-9a
 Philippians 2: 5-11
 John 12: 12-16

Introduction

It is good to be back at St Marc's, Grenoble. For those who don't know, I am a retired vicar from Edinburgh. From 2000 to 2013 Chaplain along the road in Grenoble. Susie and I were here in 2019 and 20220. And Joanna was part of the congregation in 1997-98 or thereabouts.

Preamble

We continue to move through Lent; period of penitence and prayer in church life. We accompany Jesus and his disciples on their journey towards Jerusalem; to the awfulness of Good Friday and the ultimate triumph of Easter. Today's gospel reading follows the anointing of Jesus at Bethany [12: 1-11]. When, as we heard last week, Jesus anticipated his coming death. But this morning's passage, as Jesus and his disciples reach their destination, Jerusalem, the political and spiritual capital of the country, the scene is more upbeat.

Children's Talk

Going to think about Palm Sunday using letters **P A L M**:

P stands for **prophet**:

- * Ask: What does the word prophet mean ? [Zechariah 9: 9-12]
- * Palm Sunday is the fulfilment of prophecy

A stands for **arrival** in Jerusalem:

- * the culmination of a long journey
- * Ask: What kind of reception did Jesus and the disciples get

John 12: 12-16 The Triumphal Entry cont.

L stands for **Lord**:

- * *Ask*: By what names did they hail Jesus ?
- * the Lord [of heaven and earth]; the King of Israel

ASK: But what happens later in the week ?

- * Jesus is arrested, and put on trial
- * he is lifted up on a Cross and crucified
- * *Ask*: What are the crowd shouting on Good Friday

M stands for **Me**:

- * Am I prepared to stay with Jesus through the week ahead ?
- * Not just the excitement of Palm Sunday; ... the pain of Good Friday

Mixed messages

I used to think that Palm Sunday was a great day of triumph; rejoicing with the noisy crowd as they hailed Jesus as king. Shouting *Hosanna* and waving their palm branches. Something of the character of a victorious football team ?

NB The branches of palm trees which the crowd waved has echoes of the entry of Simon Maccabeus into Jerusalem [1 Macc 13:21]. When he was received "*with praise and palm branches, and with harps and with cymbals ... with hymns and with songs*". Maccabeus was coming as a conqueror, which suggest that the crowds had a 'power' understanding of Jesus's arrival. That he might be coming as a military conqueror.

But there is an ambivalence here. Jesus comes into the city riding on a donkey, the mount of the lowliest servant. Not like Margaret Thatcher or Donald Trump, full of pomp and pageantry and self-importance.

Mixed messages

As they made their way towards Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish religion and opposition to his Messiahship, Jesus had been at pains to warn them that his mission would end in ignominy; in apparent defeat and disgrace. In death on the cross - the 1st century equivalent of the firing squad. This is a Messiah more like Father Damian, the 19thC Belgian missionary, ministering single-handedly to the lepers on Molokai; or like Mother Teresa, getting her hands dirty by ministering to the derelict and the dying on the streets of Calcutta.

The way of peace and humility and death is the way in which God's purposes and Jesus's mission will be accomplished.

"Whoever wants to be great among you", Jesus tells the disciples [Mark 10: 44-5] "must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

"This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering,
of worship to the Servant King."

So I am inclined to see Palm Sunday as a day of mixed messages.
In a week's time, after the heartbreak of Good Friday, we shall gather to celebrate, the ultimate victory of the Cross.

What am I waving today ? A palm branch ? Or a cross ?

We are called not to Triumphalism. But to Service.