

Palm Sunday

25.03.2018
By Fiona Bullock

Introduction

The story of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem is often portrayed as a massive street party, at which everyone was celebrating and joyful. The canvas of this scene is painted in broad, sweeping strokes and one can easily be deceived about what was truly taking place. One of the most major and regular conflicts we can face in real life is the conflict between the way we portray our lives and our feelings and the truth behind the masks we put on. The world may know a smiling, cheery face, when all around us life seems to be falling apart. We may appear to be the life and soul of the party, when silently we are dying inside. In this reflection, we look at the detail beneath the story of Palm Sunday and reflect upon the myriad of emotions experienced on that day.

Text

Mark 11:1–11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, “Why are you doing this?” just say this, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.”’ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Comment

We begin our Holy Week journey with a triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It is a journey filled with different emotions. It is a journey that reflects different attitudes towards life and faith. It is a journey of fear and loneliness. It is a journey that calls us to be real about how we are feeling and about what we are fearing, and also about what role faith has to play in all this. This speaks to us not only on our personal journeys through Holy Week but to our journeys through life.

The triumphant entry into Jerusalem has been depicted in many works of art. They show happy people eager to see Jesus. They show children and adults running alongside the stolen (borrowed) colt. The crowds are waving and cheering and joyful. It's easy to get caught up in the bigger picture and the excitement of the event. But I wonder what was going on behind the scenes. I wonder what range of emotions people were going through and the lengths to which they went to cover some of these up.

How were the disciples feeling around the triumphant entry? I suspect they might have been tired after their many travels. They were then asked to take something that didn't belong to them. The only time I ever heard of anyone getting away with that was in Goldilocks and the Three Bears, and even then, only because she ran away. I imagine the disciples were nervous and a little scared. They would have been a bit more scared as they were set upon before the donkey's owner could confirm their story.

Then, as they walked away with the donkey, how did they feel? Surprised? Amazed? Confused? Did they question who Jesus really was?

As they walked behind Jesus looking strange on a little donkey and looked out at the crowds, did they manage to put suitable expressions on their faces? What would be a suitable expression anyway? Solemnity? Joy? Pride? Apology?

What about the crowd? What was going on with them? They always seem to be portrayed as joyous but perhaps they were actually confused as to what was happening. Could they really have understood that they were in the presence of the Messiah? Did the crowd gather the way that drivers become rubberneckers at the scene of an accident? Was it sheer nosiness that swelled the crowd? Maybe the majority simply got carried away with the atmosphere and played along?

At the centre of all this was Jesus. As he rode into Jerusalem, how can we possibly imagine how he felt? Was he scared of what lay ahead of him? Did he feel ready for the challenges, betrayal, loneliness and rejection that he was to face? Was he confident with Father God on his side?

The story we read in Scripture barely scratches the surface. The God-man entered Jerusalem to shouts of Hosanna, which may have been genuine or sarcastic. The man, surrounded by those who were probably tired, confused and a little scared, was himself anxious about the future. And this is where we meet him on Palm Sunday, bringing the mixture of emotions we are going through at the moment.

Today, for a moment, try to forget about the weight of expectations, and simply be. Allow yourself to be honest about the range of emotions you are feeling and those you do not want others to read in your expression, words or actions. Be reminded that Jesus is the one who looks beyond what the world sees. Think about the safe places you have available to you where you can be vulnerable and find the people in your life to whom you can lay open your soul.

We come as we are to begin the Easter journey, which we know is brutal and heart-rending but ultimately tender and amazing. We open ourselves to the experience to strengthen our faith in the midst of our brokenness and to walk alongside Jesus as he walks with us.

Response

- Sit in front of a mirror and look at your reflection. Consider the emotions you are comfortable to show to others and those you try to hide. Think about vulnerability and how you respond to that word.
 - Consider the people who are part of the Palm Sunday journey. With whom do you identify most?
 - When you ask someone how they are, take time to hear their response and to show interest in them. Notice how many times in a day people ask how you are without waiting for an answer.
-

Prayer

Lord,
you fashioned us in your image,
you know us by heart,
you know our every emotion,
yet still we try to hide from you.
Draw us out of our hiding places,
and help us to relinquish our many masks
so we can stand before you,
vulnerable yet safe,
secure in your love.

Amen.