

Palm Sunday

14.04.2019
By Trevor Williams

Introduction

The importance of Jerusalem in Luke

Jesus final entry into Jerusalem brings Luke's life of Jesus close to its climax. For Luke the city of Jerusalem is particularly important. Luke begins and ends the story in the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2: 22-30; 24:52-53) and he notes that Jesus and his family return to Jerusalem every Passover (Luke 4:41-50).

in Luke, Jesus "set his face to Jerusalem" early in the narrative—at Luke 9:51-53. And, after this point, Luke constantly notes that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem—at 13:22, 13:33-34; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11—until his final entry at 19:28.

Luke's Gospel at its heart is Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

The Significance of the Passover

If the place was important, so was the timing – Passover. Passover was the feast when the story of the liberation of God's people from slavery was celebrated.

What is your most vivid experience of 'winning'? It may be your sports team achieving a long-held ambition, a personal or work related achievement that was hard won, or some other experience.

What were your feelings?

How did you celebrate?

Did you share the experience with others? Who?

For Jesus disciples' the final entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was very special. A cause

of great celebration!

Text

Luke 19.28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it."' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

Comment

We all love to chant when our side is winning. This was no different.

The crowd of disciples were shouting;

'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!'

But too much enthusiasm isn't welcome by any religious establishment. Power to the people challenges elite leadership. So, they ask Jesus to use his influence to bring some order and decency back to the scene. To give them the benefit of the doubt, the Pharisees may not have been hostile to Jesus but merely giving him some commonsense advice. Passover was the feast that recalled the story of God's people release from their slavery in Egypt, their liberation, and journey to the promised land. Under the Roman Empire, life was harsh. The people were subjected to humiliation, the loss of freedom, crushing taxes, military rule, brutal killings and crucifixions. To celebrate Passover with its story of liberation from slavery was political dynamite. Every Passover the Roman authorities were on high alert.

But despite the obvious risk, Jesus refuses the advice of the Pharisees and refuses to silence the crowd of disciples saying "If they keep quiet, these stones will start shouting."

Jesus deliberately chooses Passover and its celebration, as a vehicle to proclaim his message. This was always Jesus' priority over everything else.

The scene recalls the prophecy in Zechariah 9.9

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

That’s what the crowd were responding to in their praise of Jesus. But if we read on a little in Zechariah’s prophecy we fill out the meaning of these words.

“I, the Lord will take away war chariots and horses from Israel and Jerusalem. Bows that were made for battle will be broken. I will bring peace to nations and Your King will rule from sea to sea.”

In riding on a colt, Jesus enacted the heart of his message in declaring that the rule of God would bring peace from sea to sea.

There was agreement between Jesus and the crowd about the destination of the journey, Peace, but it became clear later that there was no agreement on the way to get there.

The crowd’s understanding was a dangerous mixture of political fundamentalism, and religious fervour. In proclaiming Jesus as King, they were praising the one who would gain victory over the Romans. This was a celebration about winning. This was the excitement of gaining freedom from their oppressors.

So the crowd were shouting, for Home Rule! Stop the Killings! Cut the Taxes! Say NO to Caesar! Soldiers go home! Free the People! and eventually Free Barabbas!

Someone wisely said, ‘When the God you worship, has the same enemies as you, you know you are worshipping an idol.’ Palm Sunday is part of Holy Week. The road to Jerusalem was the road to the cross. This was his message of Peace, redefining power. Showing that power could be creative, not destructive, liberating not oppressive, freeing not limiting. The power of Jesus is not the power of the despot, or the power of politics. It is not the power over others, it is the power of love for others. Jesus travels towards the cross, knowing that love challenges political interests. Love is not about winners over losers, it is winning for all.

In the violent context of military rule and paramilitary resistance, Jerusalem was a powder keg, as Jesus knew. It couldn’t cope with Jesus’ ‘other’ way – the way of love. So as expectations of the crowd grew with its violent aspirations of ousting the Romans, Jesus commitment to non-violence, in refusing to offer any defense other than he was the King the crowd had rightly proclaimed. It was when Jesus refused the crowds violent intentions against the Romans, that the violence within, spilled out and needed a target. The cross was the inevitable consequence when Jesus chose the power of love, over the love of power.

4Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5Let the same mind be in you that was*in Christ Jesus, 6who, though he was in the form of God,did not regard equality with Godas something to be exploited, 7but emptied himself,taking the form of a slave,being born in human likeness.And being found in

human form, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

This world values power. The power of wealth, the power of status, the power of influence.

Jesus is asking his disciples to take up their cross and follow him, and says to you and me who claim to be his followers, true greatness is found in pursuing the power of love, and the emptying of self for the good of the other.

Response

Do you prefer Palm Sunday, or Good Friday? Why?

We live in a world of political protest? What are the differences and similarities within the Palm Sunday crowd?

In our consumerist world, you pay to get what you want. Instinctively we seek that what is pleasurable and satisfying. How might contemporary culture values have influenced our faith?

The message of Palm Sunday, the celebration of Peace, is realised through the acceptance of the cross of Good Friday.

Prayer

God of our journey,
You lead us through the green pastures of Palm Sunday's hopeful celebration
when all is joyful and well-being assured.
You also lead through the valley of the shadow of Good Friday
when loss casts a fearful shadow of pain and despair.

You rode the colt of peace
and hung on a cross of sacrifice
to demonstrate the power of love.

May we be transformed by that cross,
to follow you faithfully
in days of hope and nights of loss,
for you lead us as the God of peace
Whose love has won all. AMEN

