

Prayer: Almighty God, may the words I speak be those You want spoken, may the words we hear be those You want heard and may we live to Your glory. Amen

Perhaps some of you are wondering if I've forgotten what I spoke on last month. Don't worry – you're not going to get the same sermon but as I've thought around Jesus' entry into Jerusalem - I can't get away from that thought – God's ways are not our ways. Our understanding of God and how he should act is so limited!

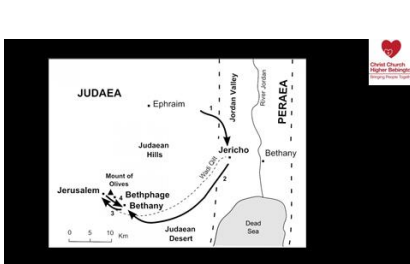
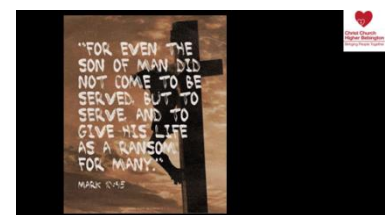


In many ways Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a story of contrasts. Jesus had spent so much of his life avoiding publicity. He often instructed those he had healed not to tell people who he was and after feeding the crowd of 5000 who wanted to make him king, he crept away quietly and spent time in prayer avoiding their desires.

So why, just as Jerusalem is building up with pilgrims for the annual celebration for the Passover does Jesus deliberately enter in a way that draws huge attention to himself? Just weeks before, after he had raised Lazarus to life, Jesus had withdrawn from Jerusalem because of his increasing popularity and the growing antagonism of the religious leaders who were plotting his death. So why choose to enter Jerusalem in such a dramatic way? Surely it would precipitate his death – but could that be the very reason why?

It was God's time. Everything seemed to have been planned – even the location of the colt! It wasn't a flash mob excited by Jesus' presence – but God's perfect plan to bring about a far greater deliverance than what the people were gathering together from across the nation to celebrate. It was going to be far more than the annual retelling of the Passover – that dramatic event when God delivered the Jews from Egypt; something far greater was about to unfold before their eyes. God was going to bring deliverance for all people, not just Jews, and from the far greater enemy – that of sin and death that had alienated all from God.

Before Jesus had commenced the return journey to Jerusalem, he had warned the disciples that he would be betrayed and condemned to death – but they didn't want to hear it. Even his closest followers and friends, James and John, responded with – when you come into your Kingdom make sure we have the best positions! They were only interested in power and position and couldn't grasp what we were looking at last week that God's glory comes through suffering and death. Jesus response to them is startling – even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. God's way aren't our ways.



Jesus and his disciples travelled from Ephraim through Jericho, where Jesus stopped to heal blind Bartimaeus who had been calling out – Jesus son of David have mercy on me. From Jericho they walked through the barren desert – which was often a place of danger - until eventually they had climbed up to the Mount of Olives – an oasis of beauty and refreshment. It was a place that would have excited any pilgrim – and no doubt there were plenty on the

road that day making their way for the festival!



The Mount of Olives was known as a place of promise – where pilgrims were welcomed! From here Jerusalem, that great city of the Jews where God was believed to dwell in the magnificent splendour of the Temple was clearly visible! Jesus' group of predominantly Galileans were no doubt overwhelmed with excitement – but possibly some sadness as it was still an occupied city.

But I wonder if what happened next came as a bit of a surprise. Jesus gave very precise details to a couple of the disciples to go and find a colt that had never been ridden and bring it to him. Did they realise they were about to see what had been foretold many years before by the prophets taking place before their eyes?

What happened next is one of those times in the Bible when you'd love to know the back story! Had Jesus pre-arranged it with the colt owners? Were they his friends – or someone who had been healed by him? Why were they so willing to let the colt go – despite this possibly being their future livelihood - their form of transport.... What if it had been injured? or was uncontrollable? What had brought them to the point where they so open to God and overflowing with generosity that they were willing to supply the Lord's needs? I'm not sure I would have responded so positively if someone had asked to borrow my new car!



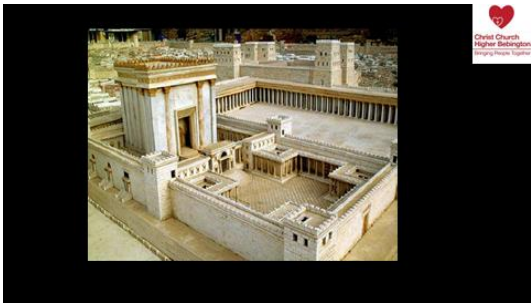
There was no doubt a carnival type atmosphere with many people entering Jerusalem at this time of festival. It wouldn't have been unusual for people to be waving palms of welcome – but what made this procession so unique was that people took off their cloaks and laid them down for Jesus riding on an untrained colt, to trample all over them. Their cloaks were valuable and could easily have been ruined on the dusty, dirty, crowded road. It was something you would only risk for a king – a bit like us laying down the red carpet!



So here were the people acknowledging that Jesus was their King – the one they had been longing for, for centuries, come to deliver them – obviously from the occupation of Jerusalem and there's nothing like a crowd to attract a crowd – even without social media! I wonder who was there? The noisy Galileans excited that they now were the “in crowd” and prophecy was being fulfilled; many who had been healed by Jesus; Bartimeaus; those who had appreciated Jesus teaching... and possibly even the Jerusalem residents. But was Jesus raising their hopes too high?

And could there have been moments when even Jesus might have been tempted to build on this popularity and enthusiasm – rather than going to the cross?

Jesus alone knew it was going to be a roller coaster of a week! He was their Messiah but not the deliverer desired. And yes, he did come riding into Jerusalem – but it was humbly, on a colt and not triumphantly on a horse ready to challenge the powers of Rome. While Jesus may have wanted them to get a glimpse of who he was, they would have to wait those agonising days of the cross and the silence of the tomb before the resurrection would confirm it. Most would need much longer, even years, to figure that out!



Jesus' destination that day was the Temple – the place where people met with God – but it wasn't happening. There was so much corruption preventing access. Mark uniquely states that Jesus simply looked around, surveying *and* observing everything and then returned that night to Bethany. I'm sure he was deeply grieved that his Father's house was no longer the house of prayer for all nations.

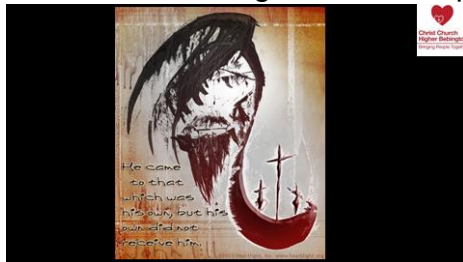
But according to Mark it was the next day that he drove out those buying and selling – no doubt after prayerful consideration. Had he done so in the presence of an exuberant crowd there would have been violence.

There was much for the people to think about that day. Their king had arrived – but he wasn't the king they had been longing for. Their desires had narrowly focussed on freedom from Rome, material blessings and the establishment of an earthly kingdom.

But Jesus had come to bring them deliverance from sin and evil and to establish an eternal kingdom based on fellowship with God – through him rather than an earthly Temple. It was radical – it was God's way – not ours and only achievable by the cross.



Was it the same crowd that so quickly turned against him – or was it the inhabitants of Jerusalem and others influenced by the religious leaders? Jesus was called king several times during the week – when being tried for blasphemy, before Pilate, when mocked by the soldiers and through



the inscription over the cross but the crowd no longer wanted to know him. His kingship was too challenging. He came unto his own but his own did not receive him.

As we come to Holy week – can I encourage you to take time to think through who you consider Jesus to be and what difference his death and resurrection means to you. Are you prepared to acknowledge him as king as give your life to following him?

God's way and desires are so often different from ours.

Lord Jesus, give us the courage to acknowledge you as our Lord and King and to follow after your ways. Amen