

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Mathew 21:1-11 (NT page 988-989)

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Reflection

The text verse of the reflection are:

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" ¹¹The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

I have said it before that Matthew is very fond of quoting from the Old Testament because his first readers were Jews and knew the Old Testament by heart. In our reading he uses Psalm 118, and the prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9 and 14.

As they approached the village of Bethphage Jesus send two disciples ahead to get him a donkey and its colt. Bethphage was a small village just to the east of Jerusalem on or near the Mount of Olives, which dominated the skyline of that side of town.

It is also interesting that in Matthew's account the disciples find a donkey and its foal. I agree with some researchers who pointed out that a foal can be better handled when its mother is close by! Maybe Matthew was just more realistic in his account. But the point and emphasis is: Jesus is riding into Jerusalem not on a horse like an earthly king but on a donkey as a humble servant who came to serve!

But despite the fact that Jesus entered Jerusalem as a humble servant, the crowds expected more. The crowd immediately acknowledges and praises Jesus as the Son of David, as the expected Messiah, the one who will free them from Roman oppression.

No wonder Matthew makes the statement that the whole Jerusalem was stirred and asking just one question namely who was this man! In fact the translation "stirred" do not really capture the real intention of the Greek word *eseisthē* which was generally used to describe earthquakes and apocalyptic upheavals. In good Scotts we can indeed say that Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem caused quite a "stushie".

I think Matthew is trying to tell us that the whole scene of the people throwing clothes and branches of trees on the road was quite unusual. It happened just once in the Old Testament in 2 Kings 9:13 when King Jehu proclaimed that he was anointed by the Lord as king over Israel.

However, when Jesus entered Jerusalem He emphasized his intentions and goal. He did not climb on a horse to fight or challenge the Roman empire. He did not climb on a horse to be the expected new king of the Jews. He climbed on a donkey, the most placid animal on this earth.

What a contrast? Although Jesus rides on a donkey, the crowds recognised Him to be a very special King. They paid their respects in a way that has only happened once in their past and that was to a king who was anointed by God.

But when the people of Jerusalem started asking questions about the identity of Jesus the crowds gave a different answer. They said that Jesus was the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.

Jesus practised what He preached. He preached love, and showed love. He preached peace and climbed on a donkey.

The crowds on the other hand did not follow their actions through. Although they showered Jesus with respect and treated him as a King, when others asked them who Jesus was: they replied that he was only a prophet.

This contrast between the actions of Jesus and the crowds would only widen in the days to come. While Jesus remain true to His words and actions namely to establish the Kingdom of heaven, the crowds would change their attitude against Jesus in the most radical way.

Why did they give a different answer and why did their attitude changed?

I think the answer to this question is closer to home than we expected. I think it is something that is also true of us.

It is easy to shout and declare Jesus as king with other like minded people or to put it differently to do it in the safety of a crowd who

think like you. It is much more difficult to declare Jesus as king to a hostile group of people. I think they were just as afraid as we are sometimes when we are confronted by other people who do not share our belief in God and our commitment to live as Christian people before God in a kind and Christian way.

So we too have to take account of our actions as Christian people - not when it is comfortable, when we find ourselves in the fellowship with other believers. No when we are confronted by people who do not agree with our views on the identity of Jesus.

We have to answer the same question that the crowd had to answer a long time ago namely: Who is this man Jesus? We have to answer it this week when others is asking us if we are going to the pub with them on Monday, or Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday or Friday evening? Are we going to tell them that we are going to attend a worship service because it is Holy week, the time when we as believers celebrate his sacrifice for our sins?

We have to be different from the "crowds" in our reading in the way we proclaim Jesus as our Heavenly king who came to save us all from sin, death and hell. As followers of Jesus we are not allowed or excused to shy away from our faith. We need to proclaim that He is our Lord and Saviour in all situations and at all times with deeds that accompany our faith.

So what are you going to tell people when they ask you, Who is this man? What are young to answer when someone asks you what do you believe?

The early church wrestled with this question and formulated a confession of faith to express their beliefs. Maybe we can use it too saying:

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
The creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
Who suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
who descended to the dead.

But on the third day He rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.

Amen