



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Matthew 27:11-26

IN THE Gospel of Matthew we find a totally different edition of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, which is much shorter. Matthew is the only Gospel writer to provide the quote from the Old Testament and the interpretation of the crowds in verses 10-11. 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. Matthew includes the place name to remind his readers how near Jesus is to Jerusalem and perhaps also to evoke the messianic associations of the Mount of Olives which is also quite evident in Zechariah 14:4. Zechariah's prophecy was widely interpreted in rabbinic literature as messianic.

It is also interesting that in Matthew's account the disciples find a donkey and its colt. Researchers have thought that Matthew interprets Zechariah chapter 9 as meaning "a donkey and its colt". However, it is a typical Hebraic parallelism or repetition for effect whereby the same sentence can be said in two different ways. I agree with some researchers who pointed out that a fowl 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 the humble king who came to serve! In those days officials often used donkeys for civil, and not military, processions.

The crowd immediately acknowledges and praises Jesus as the Son of David, as the expected Messiah. It is interesting that at this point of time what they expected him to be. Except for the acclamation “Son of David!” which indicates recognition of Jesus’ ancestry and a hope that he is the Messiah, their cry is taken from Psalm 118:25–26). The Hallel, as the composition of Psalms 113–118 was known, was sung regularly during Passover season and would be fresh on everyone’s mind.

No wonder Matthew makes the overstatement that the whole of Jerusalem was stirred and asking just one question namely who was this man! 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 with King Jehu.

According to the crowds Jesus was the prophet from Galilee. Jesus was better known in Galilee than in Judea; and ancient sources often note the regional divisions between the two.

But then in our second reading the same crowd reacted totally different in just one week. They accused Jesus of treason namely that He posed to be a king and wanted to overthrow the Roman oppressors. But they were the ones who saw that Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. I mean how could they go so far in changing their minds to accuse Jesus of posing as a king? Which earthly king would ride on a donkey?

What happened in just one week? Is this not so typical of our human state? We can indeed be so easily swayed from being serious followers of Jesus while we are in church or part of a Christian crowd to denying that we are Jesus followers while we are having fun with friends or colleagues.

Holy week is a time of reflecting on our following of Jesus. Are we going to follow him through our actions of faith, hope and love not only this week but all the remains of our lives? Are we going to seriously reflect on our faith, and the hope that we share? Are we going to show the world through our actions of loving sacrifice that we belong to Christ? Or are we going to continue with our lives as if nothing has happened.

Holy week is a time of repentance and thanksgiving. We are going to journey the via dolorosa of Jesus, the way of Jesus’ suffering. We need to know that God saved us this journey by taking this hard yoke upon him. We need to realize this week and all the weeks of our lives how

great are the mercy and forgiveness of God. You and I were supposed to walk this journey of sacrifice for our own sins but Jesus took it upon Himself to save us from death, hell and damnation. We need to continually repent and bring our sins to God, obeying Him in everything we do, say and think!

Holy week is like journeying on a mountain pass in “dreich” and misty weather. You do not always know what is in front of you, you do not know if a vehicle is approaching you or where is the end of the cliff. All you know is to have faith in the fact that God is accompanying you. All you know is to trust the Lord with your life and hope for a safe return. All you know is that God loves you and will look after you! All you know is to continue with your journey, slowly but surely because you cannot reverse or turn around, simply because there is no room!

Amen