

SERMON: 28 March 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper

It's not about us. It's all about him

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

John 12:12-16

It is not about our voices or our excitement
or our fickle natures that turn from "Hosanna!"

to "Crucify!"

It is about his willingness to take the road anyway, wherever it leads,
and to keep on going even when

the noise of the crowds died away
and when

friends abandoned him; to keep on going

when the silence became eerie and when the end was in sight.

He kept on going.

It's not about us. It's all about him.

(Spill the Beans Reflection)

This is the day, this is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Those ancient words from the Psalms that the crowd shouted and sang at the start of the Passover and the festival of unleavened bread, were designed to herald in the coming king, the saviour, none other than God himself.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (118:26).

You are my God and I will praise you (118:28).

These words are kept for God alone.

The God who is willing to keep going when the rest of us would fail.

The God who is willing to die in order to bring life.

The God who is humble and non violent and full of grace and truth.

Don't be afraid, Daughter Zion, see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt (12:15).

This was so counter cultural even then that the disciples of Jesus didn't understand what this meant. They were used to seeing kings parading with pomp and ceremony, sending military attaches ahead to ensure the security of the place they were going to, surrounded by body guards and demanding everyone's attention.

Whilst the Roman governor was making his way from the West of the country and his stately home by the sea at Tiberius, in great pomp and ceremony, Jesus entered Jerusalem from the East trusting in God to provide an appropriate means of transport and a place to celebrate the Passover with his friends, despite the plans to have him arrested and killed (John 11:57).

Willie Barclay reminds us that in first century Palestine the horse was the mount of war whereas the donkey was the mount of peace. Jesus was making it clear that he rode in as Messiah but also as the king of peace.

As Barclay put it, "he showed that he came, not to destroy, but to love; not to condemn, but to help; not in the might of arms, but in the strength of love".

Whilst the Passover crowd welcomed Jesus with palm branches and cloaks on the ground, we can see their shouts of hosanna had become shouts of crucify him within the space of a few days.

Clearly, this Jesus was not what most of them expected the Messiah to be.

He wasn't like the great warrior like Maccabean Jews whom they'd welcomed in to Jerusalem in a similar way with palm branches and psalms nearly two hundred years before, following their great military victory over the Syrian Greeks.

If Jesus knew this then he was telling a very different story of a very different kingdom.

By now he knew he was going to die and he knew his death would somehow draw all people to himself.

His message before that was 'believe in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light (John 12:36).

Jesus wasn't thinking of self preservation in the way that most of us would when faced with such a situation. He didn't run and hide.

He walked in obedience to God all the way to a premature death on a cross.

He wanted to show us that God could be trusted, that God's light would shine in the darkness and the darkness would never overcome it.

There's been a lot of darkness during this global pandemic, as well as a lot of light. Many people have died and many have lost loved ones or suffered poor health.

But even for those of us who have not suffered that sense of loss we've all lost something, whether it's been loss of freedom of movement or loss of contact with friends and loved ones.

It can be so easy to despair and lose hope. Our mood can fluctuate from moment to moment.

But the Gospel message of Jesus is trust God because God in Christ has come to save us from our despair, from our darkness, from our sin. He's made a way to carry the weight of all the heaviness and lead us from that heavy sense of captivity and imprisonment into a new exodus of freedom and hope.

Because he loves us and wants to gently and humbly enter our lives and establish his kingdom there, assuring us that everything will be alright in the making of all things new.

It's not about us. It's all about him.

And about what his Spirit can do in you and through you.

As we begin to celebrate this most holy week of Easter, why not join us each evening this week to reflect on a different aspect of what Easter means for us all?

I look forward to us being together again.

Let us pray

O Great God and heavenly Father

Thank you that in Jesus your love was made complete.

Thank you for his selfless obedience to truth and justice.

Facing up to death, Christ has become our salvation.

And our hosannas are satisfied for good.

In the same Spirit, may we walk our journey of faith.

As you make us One in Christ.

Amen.