

SERMON: 5 APRIL 2009
PALM SUNDAY
PREACHING IN OF ANDRE AS NEW MINISTER

Reading Mark 11:1-11

Sermon

Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Today I have the privilege of preaching in my husband into his new charge of Kirknewton/East Calder. It is not very often that the *wife* gets the opportunity to preach to her husband with so many witnesses present, so I am really looking forward to this!

On a more serious note:

15 Months ago, in Scotland, the charge of Kirknewton/East Calder became vacant. After many years of being led by a competent minister, these two congregations now had to start a new journey – a journey of finding a suitable new minister, and consequently, a journey of finding themselves.

15 Months ago, in South Africa, a minister and his family felt themselves called to a new country. After many years of working and serving the Lord in Africa, this family now had to start a new journey – a journey of getting accustomed with the ways of the people of Scotland, and consequently, a journey of finding themselves.

And now, in Easter 2009, the paths of Kirknewton/East Calder and André Groenewald crossed, and became one. Now these 2 congregations and this minister and his family are starting a new journey together – a journey of serving God together, and to become more and more what He wants them to be...

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Today, many many years ago, Jesus also started a journey – a journey into Jerusalem, and the beginning of this journey in a sense was the end of his journey on earth...

Our story starts at Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, about two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead to bring him a young donkey that has never been ridden. They must have thought it strange that Jesus travelled the 90 miles from Galilee to Jerusalem on foot, to ask for a donkey only two miles before they entered the Holy City! But Jesus wasn't tired, he didn't ask for a donkey because his feet needed to rest; he was planning everything he did very carefully. In the Old Testament it was prophesized that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem on a donkey, and that was exactly what he was going to do.

Why a donkey, you may ask? Why not a horse? Well, horses were regarded as animals of war, while a donkey was an animal of peace, an animal that showed Jesus' humility, that showed that he was going to conquer not only Jerusalem, but the world, by serving, and not by might.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, people recognized him as the Messiah – they treated him like a king. We read that “Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna!”, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!””. They literally laid out the first century *red carpet* for Jesus. Or like the wee girl said, who came home from church one Palm Sunday telling her daddy that she had learned all about the crowd waving their palm branches and singing a song to Jesus. The father was pleased that she had learned so much. He asked, “What was the song they were singing to Jesus?” The little girl paused, then said, “I think it was ‘O Susanna’.”

Well, she almost got it right. Hosanna is a Hebrew expression, meaning “Save!” which later became an exclamation of praise. The crowd was very pleased that at last

somebody was going to save them from Roman oppression. But they still didn't understand who Jesus really was. They expected a freedom fighter, a new political leader, and when Jesus turned out to be neither of these, their songs of praise turned into cries of condemnation.

The same crowd who shouted "hosanna", 5 days later shouted "crucify him". They had no idea what they were doing...

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We, on the other hand, can never say that "we didn't know". We know exactly what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, and why. We know that he *was* the messiah, but that his kingdom was not of this world. We know that he *did* redeem his people, but not from Roman oppression, from sin and death.

And because we know all of this, and believe that he redeemed each one of us too, we have a responsibility towards Him and the rest of *our* crowd.

We need to glorify his name in everything we say and do, we need to look after one another and show the people in our community that we care, because Jesus cared.

And specifically for this reason, God sent Andre to Kirknewton/East Calder – so that he can guide you and you can guide him for the rest of your journeys together.

There will be times when this is going to be an easy task, when you will laugh together and have fun together. But there will also be times when this is going to be harder, when you might not want to hear what Andre is telling you (or the other way around), or when you will have to bear your crosses together. But no matter what we have to face, because of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, we know that we do not have to face it on our own.

There are lots of similarities between our story and the story we read in Scripture. Just like Jesus' entry into Jerusalem signaled a new beginning for his people, for all of humanity, André's induction to this charge signals a new beginning for Kirknewton/East Calder. Accept him as God's servant, and André, serve these children of God as best you can...

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Rev Dr André Groenewald

I accept my call to this congregation and open myself to God's Holy Spirit knowing and accepting that He is in power. Let us all keep traveling in the years to come to the New Jerusalem with much joy, expectation and hope. May we travel light with only our Bibles as a map and our prayers as our fuel to carry on when we are tired, weary, sad or sick! May God help us to live our faith as we travel to the New Jerusalem.

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Bible study notes.

Mark 11.1-11

None of the Gospels is innocent of theological interpretation. This is particularly true when evaluating the story of the Triumphal Entry. We read the story in the light of Easter, as did the earliest Christians. Their view of Jesus was indelibly conditioned by the resurrection, according to which it was believed that Jesus was the heavenly Lord who was entitled to worship alongside God (see especially Philippians 2.9-11). Mark sees the Triumphal Entry from the perspective of Easter faith and writes it up in that light. Jesus did enter Jerusalem as Messiah; but clearly in Mark's Gospel the only people who recognised him as such were the inner members of the Jesus circle.

Other readings:

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-9; Isaiah 50.4-9a;
Philippians 2.5-11; Mark 14.1-15.47

A word of thanks to the congregation:

Thank you very much for your generosity and good will at my induction. Thanks for all the cards and gifts that we received.

It is heart-warming to know that you have accepted me as your new minister and my family as your family.

I am looking forward to working alongside all of you, serving the Lord as best as we can. I firmly believe in the words of Psalm 127: “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.”

With all my good wishes,

André