

Church of All Nations

Palm Sunday April 13, 2025

Today millions of Christians throughout the world remember and in some form re-enact Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and in doing so the whole church marks it's own entry into Holy Week.

We join in an act of solidarity, that we stand with Jesus in his resolve to enter that ancient conflicted holy city but just as equally this modern conflicted city of competing allegiances, power plays and interests.

Christians, not exclusively but significantly still observe Palm Sunday as a peace march – a public demonstration – that includes protest and a public lamentation that our and every other nation didn't know “what makes for peace.”

What we say about any ancient or modern city can equally be said of the human heart – for it too is a place of competing allegiances and interests; and yes the resolve of Jesus is equally in the transformation of the individual heart that is walled and protected like any ancient city.

There are no palms in Luke, not even leafy branches which Mark and Matthew have. Just cloaks in Luke – the outer garment. But Outer Garment Sunday or even Cloak Sunday do not have much traction so we stick with the more traditional “Palm Sunday.”

Ps 118 is the last of the Hallel psalms which were sung by pilgrims as they approached Jerusalem—and it has the significance of being the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. It was originally associated with the coming of the king to Jerusalem, and the symbolic action of throwing cloaks on the road is associated with welcoming the conquering king, as Jehu is welcomed in 2 Kings 9.13. The psalm only later becomes associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, which is when leafy branches (Matthew and Mark) or palms (John) were associated with it. By omitting any reference to palms or other branches, Luke is taking us back to the first meaning of this psalm.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem the crowds didn't sing their hosannas and wave their palm branches because they were so incredibly captivated by Jesus' message of love and grace. For them, the Messiah was coming to raise up an army, and with the help of God, Rome would be sent scurrying back home with their pagan tails between their legs.

In a time when the passions of the oppressed and occupied people were alive to the slightest hint of arousal this Warrior King was expected to enter astride a compelling war horse. Much of the pathos of this day is that Jesus isn't just staring down his professed enemies. He was also coming to Jerusalem to disappoint his devotees in colossal fashion. They were ready for an uprising and a military/ political victory.

And into Jerusalem, and to the cross he went. Jesus, prepares to take up his cross. And die.

In reference to Palm Sunday, Frederick Buechner writes this: “Despair and hope. They travel the road to Jerusalem together, as together they travel every road we take — despair at what in our madness we are bringing down on our own heads and hope in him who travels the road with us and for us and who is the only one of us all who is not mad.”

Palm Sunday is, in part, about the sheer doggedness of Jesus' commitment in the face of rejection by the people he lived among. The measured plodding of a donkey which the hymn, “Ride on, Ride on in Majesty”, always suggests conveys something of the tenacity of his obedience to continue on the path on which he had set out. There were hosannas that day, and palm branches, and noise and jubilation, but there was also the steadfast resolve to face and overcome with his self giving whatever else would be thrown at him in the coming days - the same violence and the hatred that we still see, to our shame, in our own day whether in the child soldiers in Africa, Gaza, Kiev, or Melbourne CBD, or again, in our own heart. They give us something of a picture of the potential violence faced by Jesus and any person who seeks to follow in the steps of this Peace Maker.

Watch Jesus throughout this week. Listen to what he says. He never defends himself. He never tries to justify himself or offer excuses. He doesn't try to negotiate or plea bargain a better deal. He doesn't express any sense of entitlement or put himself above others. He neither explains himself nor apologizes. And he does not turn back.