

Halle, Halle, Halle (Palm Sunday)

Mark 11:1-11

Everyone loves a good parade! And in this time of lock downs and physical isolation, so many parades have been cancelled – we had no Christmas parades, no St Patrick’s parade, the huge Rose Bowl parade in the US was cancelled. We are maybe beginning to forget what parades are like!

But usually, there is cheering, and clapping as people pass by? Sometimes there is some singing. And there is almost always plenty of waving!

A parade is a sense of celebration.

And that’s what it was like when Jesus came into Jerusalem. There was so much excitement. Word had spread throughout the town that Jesus of Nazareth was coming – and people were excited!

They had heard about how Jesus had healed people; they had heard about how he had preached with such conviction; they knew that he had a great command of the scriptures and the prophecies – and they were excited.

Now you need to understand that excitement was not an everyday occurrence for these people. They actually lived in pretty bad conditions under Roman occupation. They didn’t have a lot of freedom. They were watched very carefully by the Roman authorities – guards were always on the look-out for any trouble! It would be a bit like if Tavistock had soldiers with guns watching us every day. It’s not nice – and we know that some people in our world today do live in such terrible and oppressive conditions, and they literally fear for their lives.

And that’s what it was like the people in Jerusalem.

So, when they heard that Jesus was coming, they were filled with hope that he was coming to save them. He was coming to be their new ruler – he would overthrow the Roman government, and he would be their new King.

So, they were REALLY excited!

And they lined the streets shouting out in excitement. Let’s just imagine what that must have been like for a minute. I want you to stand up at home, and shout as loud as you can, wave your arms, and smile shout ... HOSANNA! HOSANNA! HOSANNA!

Let’s try it

(Repeat – standing and waving arms.)

Didn’t that feel good?

If I could somehow listen and see you all at home, that would be a lot of excitement!

That’s a lot of celebration.

Now you would think that anyone who was greeted in that way, might get a little carried away themselves in the celebration. They might feel like a bit of a celebratory.

Waving at the crowds. (action)

Maybe blowing kisses (action).

Don't you think that would be normal?

But Jesus doesn't do that. In fact, he does absolutely the opposite.

He does everything possible to be as quiet and as humble as could be:

He doesn't choose a big horse, or a chariot to come into the city – no, he chooses a small donkey.

And he doesn't have a fancy saddle on the donkey – no, he just sat on the cloaks thrown over the bare back of the donkey.

And he doesn't make a big fancy speech and cash in on the popular vote of the people (unlike maybe some politicians) – no, he doesn't say anything! He just looks around, and then he leaves the city again.

And Jesus doesn't even celebrate with his disciples about how the day went – no, we are told in Luke's version of the story, that instead of celebrating with his friends, "Jesus wept over Jerusalem!"

You see for Jesus, this day is not about the big celebratory parade.

For Jesus this day was really about walking the path that he knew would lead to his own death.

Jesus is humble in this parade, because he is humbly accepting death.

I imagine that the people who had lined the streets shouting in celebration, were perhaps a little disappointed about how Jesus behaved. They must have expected more from Jesus.

They probably walked away from the crowds saying – "well that was a bit of a let down".

They probably begin to doubt that this really was the saviour that they had been waiting and hoping for.

In fact, as soon as the parade was over, and they had walked away from the celebratory atmosphere – they might well have forgotten that they were ever shouting praises of 'Hosanna' to Jesus.

Perhaps that is a bit like us. We find it easy to sing songs of praise when we are gathered together here in church, to clap our hands, (actions) shake tambourines (actions) and even raise our arms in praise (actions). But, when we are not able to gather for celebration and worship in this sanctuary, when we are at home, or in the workplace, then it can be so much harder to remember to sing praises to God. Do you find that to be true?

We also need to remember that this day when we waive palm branches and shout “Hosannas”, is just the beginning of the story.

We need to remember that all those people that lined the streets for the celebratory parade, were the very same people that gathered in a mob and shouted, “Crucify him!”

What a fickle crowd.

Let’s imagine for a moment that we are part of that crowd.

I invite you from home to shout those same words, three times:

CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM!

No, don’t just whisper or mouth them – I mean really shout them. In Luke 23: 23, we’re told that the crowds,

“with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed.”

So, try it again, even louder and with more conviction.

CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM!

I’m sure that didn’t feel too good did it?

It’s so much easier to shout words of celebration.

It’s not easy being fickle and changing how we feel.

But perhaps we are no different than those people. When everything is going well and blessings fill our lives, it’s easy to shout and sing God’s praises. Then when we can’t feel God with us, or when we see injustice in the world, or we begin to get pandemic weariness and anxiety for the future, we might sometimes begin to accuse God of not caring or we even turn our backs on God. When tragedy strikes, I’ve even heard some people ask, “How did God allow that to happen?”

When we turn from celebration to condemnation, then really we are no different from those people that lined the streets ... and it doesn’t feel good.

And perhaps we should also pause and reflect on how that must have felt for Jesus. He rode into Jerusalem, he heard all those shouts of joy and praise, and yet he knew that soon, those shouts would change.

He knew that even his disciple would betray him.

He knew that Peter would deny him.

He knew that these celebrating people would not walk the path to the cross with him.

He knew that would desert him.

Are we ready to walk with Jesus this Holy Week?

Because it is not enough to just shout Hosanna today, then Halleluiah on Easter Sunday, without walking through the pain and sorrow that this week holds.
Because, if we do that, my friends, then we are cheating ourselves of truly experiencing the promise and covenant of trust, love, healing, and hope.

As we enter into Holy week, I will be sending out a daily reflection by email, and I encourage to read it, and intentionally take some time to prayerfully reflect.

Join us for the Good Friday service, as we ask ourselves – Were You There?

Come and experience walking with Jesus this week.

Come and experience Gods promises for you, through Jesus Christ. Amen.