

WORSHIP THE LORD

APRIL 5, 2020

PALM SUNDAY IN THE MIDST OF COVID 19

Hymn – Ride On Ride On In Majesty

Ride on, ride on in majesty! Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry; O Savior meek, pursue your road with palms and scattered garments strowed.

Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die: O Christ, your triumphs now begin o'er captive death and conquered sin. (Henry Hart Milman 1827)

Matthew 21: 1-11

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, **“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”** 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 **“Say to Daughter Zion, “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey”, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’**

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, **“Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”** 10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, **“Who is this?”** 11 The crowds answered, **“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”**

On this Palm Sunday, we are drawn again to reflect on Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem which was interpreted in different ways by those who were present at the scene over two thousand years. For some it was a spectacle, for others it raised the hope of political transformation, yet for others it was the opportunity for religious reform which would no doubt pose a threat to the temple-based theology of Judaism.

The poignant question for the whole city was **‘Who is this?’** The average person in street, aware of the theological times and the hope they had for Israel wanted to ascertain if this could be the Christ of whom the prophets spoke. The answer given to the urgent question was **‘ This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth’.**

Jesus came riding on a foal, the colt of a donkey – a far cry from the mystical, magical or military leader many were anticipating. It was a borrowed animal and the swaddling clothes used to create a safe seat and the under-foot carpeting were donated by the crowd who were celebratory and sensed victory. The

loud Hosannas and the palm waving suggested a king who was welcomed albeit with a crowd mentality that sadly would not be long lived. Jesus overturned the expected 'triumphant entry' by abandoning the warlike imagery and adopted the lowly procession that many could not comprehend. So by the end of the week, their frustrations and disappointment became manifest in the cry 'Crucify Him'

Each Palm Sunday, as we enter Holy Week, we cast our theological minds over this scene, perhaps searching for meaning and relevance and with deep criticism of the fickleness of the crowd. They are no less fickle than the crowd in the opening scene of 'Julius Caesar' by William Shakespeare. How quickly they had shifted from Pompey to Caesar to the amazement of tribunes Flavius and Murellus.

Today, in the midst of COVID 19, the curiosity and fickleness of the crowd still pervades. If we are not careful, we can easily allow the exigencies of the coronavirus to overtake the theological space of Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter. The raw reality is that the coronavirus is not only impacting human lives but in real ways it threatens existing ideologies, methodologies, institutions and cultures. There are many wondering minds as persons struggle to find Jesus in the midst of this crowded space. The constant updates and information, the rising death tolls, the restrictions and curfews, the real fear of the economic fallout, the personal anxieties and worries all have the potential to erode the core of our faith.

Some have opined that the world has been chaotic for a long while and that this virus has highlighted the disparity, inequity and discrimination which exist. They share a hope that this moment will become a marker for change towards the improvement of human relationships and a change in the pervasive man's inhumanity to man.

Let us be assured on this Palm Sunday that in the midst of the suffering and fear, King Jesus still rides into our lives and that we need to offer full regard. Our attention is being called to a new reality not only around the physicality of COVID19 but how we treat with each other in the home, the market place, the Church, the political arena and in fact every sphere of human existence. The threads of our relationships ought to be differently woven as we seek to uphold the dignity and worth of each other. One of the stark ironies of COVID 19 has been the recognition of the nature of employment, the importance of particular workers – particularly those deemed as insignificant and leased paid and the questions around who is of more worth.

Jesus still gives the instruction to '**Go to the village ahead of you**'. In this village the resource needed by Jesus was prearranged and available without resistance. Perhaps the ones sent were hesitant to leave the Master's presence out of fear and uncertainty, but they ventured into the village nonetheless and found the resource just as Jesus had indicated. Their venture taught them that Jesus had long established relationships that bode well for Him in the hour of need. There was no hesitation to provide for the need of the Master.

Perhaps this is a time for us to examine the relationship shared with the village i.e. persons we normally despise, persons we would rather not be associated with, places we would not normally go to – and begin to recognize worth and dignity as never before. In our village are the cleaners, garbage collectors, domestic workers, the \$6.50 per hour workers whom we have sometimes deemed as

dispensable . Here they are as a mighty army coming to the aid of many nations alongside the doctors, nurses, technicians , security personnel and political leaders. Yes, the village dwellers are needed more than ever, and their resources are available to the Master and to us.

The resource of the village fulfilled the prophetic word. **‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey’** found in Zechariah 9:9. The humility associated with the donkey defied the comprehension of those with great expectations. Similarly in these days there is a blurring of the lines and distinctions are no longer of significance. From east to west, north to south around the world , we are all seeking the same solution. Theologically, **we are all seeking the same Saviour** in these days. Let us be assured that He is here with us , seeking to save and deliver us from all evil . Jesus’ presence may be less than what some are expecting but for the Church , we can know this certainty that He is present and that His love and care for the world is still the same. **‘For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only begotten Son, that whomsoever believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life’** – (John 3:16.)

So , while some still ask **“Who is this?”** , the Church can speak with certainty in the midst of COVID19 - **“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”** This Jesus is still able to conquer even coronavirus! This current situation is not too hard for the one who prepares a table in the midst of the wilderness-experience. The regular creature comforts such as freedom of movement maybe denied at this time but think for a moment of those for whom life is lost due to the virus. Think for a moment of the tremendous personal sacrifices being made by thousands who risk their lives so that we may remain alive.

More so, think for a moment of the Christ who gave His live so that we might live!

Who is this? It is Jesus who comes to seek and to save the lost and who calls each of us to come into a new relationship or renew our relationship with Him.

On this Palm Sunday , in the midst of COVID19 , let us know with certainty that Jesus is still available and able to conquer and to redeem.

His kingdom cannot fail; he rules o’er earth and heaven; the keys of earth and hell are to our Jesus given. Lift up your heart, lift up your voice; rejoice, again I say, rejoice. (Charles Wesley 1744)