

## **Palm Sunday**

**14.4.19**

### **Medstead, Lasham & Bentworth**

#### **Jesus comes to Jerusalem as king**

**Isaiah 50. 4-9a.**

**Philippians 2. 5 - 11**

**Luke 19.28-40**

<sup>28</sup> After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup> As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, <sup>30</sup> 'Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" say, "The Lord needs it."' "

<sup>32</sup> Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?'

<sup>34</sup> They replied, 'The Lord needs it.'

<sup>35</sup> They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

<sup>37</sup> When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

<sup>38</sup> 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!'

'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'

<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!'

<sup>40</sup> 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

Let us pray:

*Lord Jesus as you enter the city of Jerusalem on this Palm Sunday help us to see and understand the question you put to us, and two choose to follow the Prince of peace. In the name of the Father, .....*

Over the past few days a man has been drawing closer and closer to a city - intent on conquering it.

A few days ago, he arrived and now a battle is raging.

The Libyan military commander Khalifa Haftar has been setting his sites on the city of Tripoli for some while.

Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army, backed by the United Arab Emirates, is leading a multi-pronged assault on the capital in an attempt to overthrow the Tripoli-based government.

And last Sunday the battle for Tripoli escalated and within three days 47 people were killed, 181 injured and half a million children are at direct risk.

Since then, there have been air attacks on the airport, thousands of civilians have tried to escape, there is carnage.

This is what happens when you come not in peace, but in violence and war.

Meanwhile to counter this invasion, *Operation Volcano of Anger* is aimed at "*purging Libya of all aggressors*".

In complete contrast, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he came in peace. It was a non-violent demonstration of love and humility.

We have a King who rides a donkey – not a horse, a chariot or a tank.

But when he came to the City, everyone knew a regime change was taking place.

This was the day that God's people had been praying for.

They had been under the boot of Rome.

They had been reduced to nothing more than a puppet state.

They had no king, because the Romans wouldn't let them have one.

In those days, Jerusalem was a small city in modern terms– About 1 km<sup>2</sup>.

North West of the city there were some densely populated suburbs.

And then the Upper City, standing on higher ground was where the wealthy, elite neighbourhood lived.

Throughout the Roman world the rich tended to build their houses on the hills.

They were sunny and well ventilated and, most importantly, the drains all ran downhill.

The richer live higher up, the poorer lower down in the valleys.

The Upper City was a place for the upper classes, hence the name - the aristocracy of Jerusalem and Judaea.

Meanwhile the Lower City, smelt of something altogether less pleasant.

And like all ancient cities, Jerusalem was largely a place of unimaginable squalor.

Most people in Jerusalem lived slums. And it is into the slum area that Jesus enters the Lower City.

It was a place of poverty and narrow alleyways, with very little direct sunlight.

Each home a place of multiple occupancy, rented rooms, cheap boarding houses.

These alleyways of the ancient city were not for the faint hearted – they were unhealthy, and difficult to police.

Even Roman soldiers, despite better fearsome reputation, refused to patrol. Losing your way here could mean losing your life.

And so Jesus enters the poorest part of the city: where there was no privacy, no sunlight, where it was almost impossible to find fresh water.

It is likely that he entered through the Dung Gate. And as the name suggests, this is where the sewage of the city overflowed, on their way to the valley below.

The Dung Gate was the most impure part of the city, in every sense.

It was also the place where there was an endless parade of sheep, goats and cattle on their way to be sold or slaughtered, the streets would have been in a filthy state.

So this was the Jerusalem the Jesus came to.

A magnificent Temple on one ridge, rich housing and a sumptuous palace on the others.

And, in between, alleyways, cramped streets and crowded houses, shops and shanty town, and the sound of animals nervously awaiting slaughter.

A city of ritual purity and unimaginable filth.

The city of sunlight and shadows, Upper and Lower. And into the city, a new king was about to enter.

It was the beginning of Passover week, one of the most important weeks, if not *the* most important week, of the Jewish calendar.

He would have been engulfed in a sea of pilgrims.

As he rode over the crest of the Mount of Olives on that spring morning there would have been a sea of tents and makeshift shelters spreading out in the valley below, and to the north.

And here is Jesus, descending through the crowds, surrounded by his followers, by those he had preached to, healed, released; those whose lives have been transformed.

And gathering new followers as well, scooping up those who were desperate to see things change and to find a hope;

they waved their branches and join in the chanting, then wrap themselves around the procession, as Jesus wades through the sea of people.

This is a deliberate, prophetic statement. It's a staged event, an act of religious theatre that makes reference to a number of Old Testament prophecies, notably Zachariah 9:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey.*

This is the vocabulary of the Messiah, the anointed one, the king of Israel.

'*I'm the King*' is the message, at least of those who know their Old Testament prophets.

Whether they have spotted the reference or not, the people greet him with a custom usually

associated with royalty; they throw their cloaks on the ground and wave their palm branches.

Jesus is riding a donkey a few sizes too small for him, like a grown man riding a kids bike.

Meanwhile, as with every volatile major festival, Pontius Pilate was arriving on the opposite side of the City.

Usually there were only around 500 soldiers guarding Jerusalem and they left it to the High Priest and his Temple Police to keep order.

But for Passover, the Roman authorities would have made sure that there was a strong Roman military presence.

They came with their gleaming armour and burnished leather, cavalymen on horseback and the Imperial Eagle on a standard leading the procession.

Foot soldiers were pushing the people out of the way.

A display of power. It was an entrance to let the city know he had arrived.

And he is entering on the opposite side of the city having travelled from Caesarea.

And so Jesus on Palm Sunday enters Jerusalem not just as an act of prophetic symbolism, but as a deliberate parody of the procession which was taking place on the other side of the city - the rich side.

On the west side of Jerusalem there was power and prestige, there was Pontius Pilate with the economic, political and military authority; but on the east there was an entirely different, radical form of power.

To the west the kingdom of the world; from the East comes Jesus and the kingdom of God.

Not a warlike Messiah.

Not like the military procession on the other side of the city.

No, on the other side of the city there was the Roman war machine, making its home in the wealth and privilege of the Upper City; but from the East came the tumbledown, ragamuffin regime of the Prince of peace.

This was the choice that Jesus presented to the people that day: to the leaders of the Temple, to the scribes and the lawmakers and the Temple police,  
to the pilgrims in their tents and the poor in the tenements– and to everyone who has sought to follow him ever since; which King are you going to choose?

The rule of Rome or the kingdom of God?

Whose side are you on?

The rest of this Holy Week is a time when we reflect on the choices we have made with our lives.

It is also a chance to turn around, or in the language of Jesus, to repent, and to take new steps in the direction of Christ.

It is a challenge. It is a difficult choice to follow Jesus. But it is the way to Life, and life in all its fullness.

We pray for the peace of the world.  
In an age when violence is so often used to create regime change, we pray for the innocent families,

men, women and children, who find themselves at the mercy of western funded weapons.

Jesus said, there is another way. Follow me.

Peace I leave with you, not as the world gives....

Amen.