

Ride on, ride on
Bible readings: Matthew 21 vv.6-16

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Thy last and fiercest strife is nigh ...
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, thy power and reign.*

Another glorious morning, with the daffs in the back garden shouting Hosanna! Hard to believe that we're living through dark days, with the PM (bless him!) in hospital and health workers giving their all to battle the virus. It doesn't really hit home until it strikes someone near at hand. Family in my street sharing concerns over their three daughters — all nurses, all exhausted and near to breaking point. Many like them across the country — yet medics still volunteering because they want to help. Thank God for their courage and skill.

Our readings this week echo that duality. We're following Jesus on the road to the Cross, from Palm Sunday's triumphal entry to the Passion. Busy days on the streets of the city, days of teaching, debating, healing, winning hearts and minds for the Kingdom of God. Quiet evenings in Bethany, having dinner with friends, friends who have no idea of the inner turmoil, and the spiritual battle that lies ahead — a battle which will demand the ultimate sacrifice.

Except, this evening, there is one person who gets a glimpse of the cost of the Kingdom. *A woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it over his head as he sat at table.* Who was she? We don't know — Matthew doesn't give her a name. Dinner parties were masculine occasions: women were only there to provide the food (or the entertainment). But Jesus sees a real woman, a person worth remembering — an extravagant gesture that reaches into the heart of the Passion.

Smells are evocative. As the spiced ointment fills the room with its rich scent, it becomes the scene of a coronation. Jesus is being anointed as King, the promised king who will redeem his people. Or is it a funeral? The same spices are used by the women to mask the scent of death — as Jesus' friends will be taking them to anoint his body before the week is out. Yes, it is a coronation: but this king will only come into his kingdom by passing through the darkness of death. That's the only way this battle can be won.

And beyond the darkness, there is hope. There will be a future, a future in which the stories of these days will go on being told, and will go on being good news for the world. *"By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."*

God bless, Loveday

This ancient prayer of St Augustine is a good one to say at night: for all those in hospital or care homes, and for those who care for them:

Keep watch, dear Lord, with all who wake, or watch, or weep this night: and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick; give rest to the weary; sustain the dying; calm the suffering; and pity the distressed: all for your love's sake, O Christ our Redeemer. Amen.