

Two weeks ago, in Alison's talk about Martha of Bethany, she spoke of the Mount of Olives and how Jesus would have gone around it to reach Bethany. The Mount of Olives is one of three peaks of a mountain ridge that runs for about 2 miles just east of the Old City of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley. As a vantage point to look over the old Jerusalem during the time of Jesus, it was one of the most striking.

In the time before Jesus' death on the cross, the Mount of Olives featured quite significantly in his story. Today is Palm Sunday. On this day, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, descending down into the Old City from the Mount of Olives. Seeing the city spread out ahead, he wept. In Luke Ch 19 we read from v 42: *How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and the peace is hidden from your eyes.* During the following days, Jesus spent much of his time teaching in and around Jerusalem, in the Temple and on the Mount of Olives. It is here that he tried to explain to his Disciples about what would happen in the last days. He talked about the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem. He talked about how people would come in his name, falsely claiming to be the Messiah. He described how his followers would be persecuted and hated all over the world and how many of them would turn away from him. He painted a picture of sin and war; of earthquakes and famines. It was a bleak outlook. But Jesus didn't stop there. He went on to explain to them that just as it seemed like the stars will fall from the sky and the end was upon them, He, the Son of Man, will return on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. All who endured to the end would be saved.

Jesus returned to the Garden of Gethsemane on the slopes of the Mount of Olives after the Passover meal, the Last Supper, with his Disciples, and it is where he agonised over what he knew to be coming. It doesn't end there - he returned again about 40 days later and it was from there that he ascended into heaven.

Does anyone else find it is quite easy to draw parallels between this outlook and what we often feel? I didn't have to try too hard. We are at the end of winter. January and February just seemed so long and so cold. Would it every get warm again? Would anything ever grow again? It's been a long year of lockdowns, social distancing and being apart from those we love. Will this ever end? But if there is one thing that we can all count on, it is that just as the dawn follows a dark night, so too does spring follow winter. The snowdrops have been and gone, the daffodils are out. The clocks changed last night and it's still sort of light outside now. The forecast high for Tuesday is 20 degrees! Tomorrow we will see a slight lifting of the lockdown restrictions and there is more to come. The vaccine has brought hope to us all.

Just when we think we cannot take any more, we can remember the lesson from the fig tree. And with it, we can remember that no matter how dark the night gets, no matter how cold the winter seems, the Lord is always there walking with us and he is eternal. Heaven and earth may disappear, but his words never will.

Amen