

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday March 28, 2021 (Palm Sunday)
Reading – John 12: 12-16 The Triumphal Entry

An Evangelical pastor invited to preach in an Anglican church stood in the pulpit and tapped the microphone to make sure that it was on. He heard nothing, even though, the microphone was working fine. So he leaned closer to the microphone and said, "There is something wrong with this thing." The congregation, being well trained Church of England people immediately responded, "And also with you."

We can be so steeped in routine that we stop paying attention. Bible stories like Palm Sunday and Easter are so familiar that we stop paying attention to the message. The challenge is to read these accounts with "fresh eyes". This morning, I want to share with you what I see in this familiar story of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. **I see a strong declaration of love.**

As recorded in the 4 gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, I see that this event was so out of character for Jesus. Jesus had always avoided the spotlight. In John 2, Jesus is asked by his mother to help with an embarrassing wine shortage problem. Jesus responded, "My time is not yet come." In John 6, when the people wanted to take Jesus and make him king by force. Jesus left town. Whenever Jesus seems to be getting to a point of success in a community, Jesus would move to a new community. On several occasions Jesus tells those that he has healed, "Don't tell anyone". Definitely, Jesus was not looking for public demonstrations. He was not seeking the spotlight.

Until today when this event was organized by Jesus himself. In Luke, Jesus told his disciples to go to town to find this donkey. If they were asked why they were taking the donkey, they were to respond: "The Master has need of Him ". This was not a spontaneous demonstration, Jesus intended it to happen. But why has Jesus orchestrated this grand demonstration?

Yet, this procession was not frivolous, it was purposeful. It was not provoked by vanity but by compassion and love. Why? I think because it was time. It was time for Jesus to do what he came to do. The religious leaders had previously decided that it was unwise to make a move against Jesus during the Passover celebration. They felt it would cause too much of an uproar. So, they were willing to wait until things cooled down. All of that changed after this parade.

Then I thought about why it was important to Jesus that these men arrest him during Passover? Could it be because it was God's plan for Jesus to die at the same time as all the other sacrificial lambs? To understand the significance of this we need to revisit the essence of the Passover celebration.

Passover was a yearly celebration commemorating the freeing of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. God had struck every first born child of the Egyptians but God told the Israelites to slaughter a lamb and apply the blood to their doorposts and the angel of death will pass them over. This event pointed to another Lamb who would die to free us from a much greater slavery; our slavery to sin and death. Think about it, that at the very time Jesus was dying on the cross . . . the lambs were being slaughtered for the Passover feast. He was the Lamb of God taking on the sins of the world.

I also see that Jesus wanted it to be clear that this was a voluntary act. We read throughout the gospels of times when people want to kill him and he simply walked away. They had no power over him. Knowing what was before him: betrayal, humiliation, suffering, death, he chose to come to Jerusalem. Such is the magnificent love of our Saviour. Jesus was not the unwilling victim of a vicious plot. He was a willing sacrifice for all believers. **Do you see what I see? Jesus' strong declaration of love for you and me.**

I also see a strong reason for hope. V.14 says, Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" This is a quote from the book of Zechariah that a King would ride into Jerusalem one day on a donkey. The declaration was made around 550 years before Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The Jewish people wanted to be liberated from the Roman Empire, but Jesus arrived to liberate them from much more than that. The Jewish people wanted Jesus to act in a certain way, but Jesus acted to accomplish the will of God, his Father, and not the will of men. They failed to realize that the prophecy had been fulfilled, and that the King of kings and Lord of lords had arrived in Jerusalem. They failed to understand all of this because their sight was focused on their earthy needs and wants, and not the will of God.

This last year, has been so painful. The pandemic has brought so much hardship and loss, fear and loneliness, suffering and pain in various ways into our lives. And even when the pandemic is gone, the aftermath will continue to reverberate for many years. Will there be moments when we question God's love for us? The answer is yes! Whenever that happens, we need to look again at the parade into Jerusalem and see with new eyes that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem we were on his mind and the death he willingly suffered was a sacrifice designed to make us part of his family. We must remind ourselves constantly that Jesus knows you and me and he loves us.

V. 16 says, "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him." When Jesus rode into Jerusalem the disciples missed the significance of that day. Only later did they come to see the hand of God in all that was taking place. There are times the same may be true in your life and my life as well. This world in which we live is not running out of control. God is not surprised by what is taking place in our society today. God is not pleased with what is happening but he is not caught off guard. God is not wringing His hands wondering what to do. He's in control.

God knows what he is doing. We may not understand but we can trust him. In fact, I have come to accept that God does not require us to understand. He just asks us to trust Him. Are you willing to do so?

Today, I invite you to take a fresh look at this familiar event of Jesus riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. You may be surprised at what you see.

Dolapo Ogunbawo