

Parishes of St Philips and All Saints Kew with St Luke's Kew

Where all God's children are Welcome

Bible Study for the second week of the Covid 19 church building closure

Section 1: Matthew 21: 1-11

Prayer: Almighty God, as we begin our observance of Holy Week, bring us through your word every closer to Christ, our humble king. Amen

Read the passage through twice.

Matthew 21: 1-11

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."

After a quick rendition of "We have a King who rides a donkey" just to get that out of your system, here is some background.

- Jesus has deliberately steered clear of Jerusalem for quite a long time. Matthew describes how he crisscrosses Galilee, visiting many towns and out of the way places, teaching, healing, talking about his impending Passion in Jerusalem, but seeming never to head in that direction.
- Now Jesus is ready to start the full-on confrontation with the religious authorities, based in the Jerusalem Temple, using every tool at his disposal – fulfilling prophecy, drawing great crowds, causing a commotion in the Temple

This passage is replete with codes, nods, winks and hidden messages, so how much of this has Jesus organised in advance?

- The donkey stunt has clearly been prepared beforehand.
- Are the disciples in on this too, as they spread their cloaks on the road (a gesture of welcome to a King)?
- How much does the crowd know of all these preparations? After all, the crowd is probably mainly composed of pilgrims from Galilee, some of whom would have witnessed the acts of Christ and heard his parables.

- The passage from the prophet Zechariah (9:9-10) is a well-known Messianic text. In full, it talks of a return to peace within Israel's borders and the full implementation of God's promise to Abraham in terms of territory and blessing.
- Anyone riding into Jerusalem on a donkey is very deliberately attaching the fulfilment of that prophecy to themselves – this is a very conscious, deliberate act by Jesus. In his actions, he is saying, "I am the Messiah."
- "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" is a quotation from Psalm 118:23-25, which was sung as pilgrims completed their triumphant entry into the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. In attaching it to Jesus as he rides a donkey, these pilgrims (who are in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover) are conferring on Jesus a double title in Israel – both king and Messiah.
- And yet, when questioned about the identity of this man on the donkey, the pilgrims describe him as "the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." They have just taken part in a (highly irregular) coronation procession and an ordination to the priesthood, but have still only got as far as understanding Jesus as a prophet – "the prophet" perhaps, but is this going as far as naming Jesus as the Messiah?

Read the passage again, out loud if possible.

What does it teach us about:

- God?
 - Do you see God in this event?
 - Is this scenario consistent with your understanding of God?
 - Which divine characteristics are at work here?
 - Do we dare to discern divine love in this passage?
- Jesus?
 - Is this behaviour natural or forced?
 - Why has it taken so long for Jesus to declare himself as Messiah this publicly?
 - Does this chime with your image of the Messiah?
 - A king usually rides a white charger: Jesus is on a foal that has never been ridden before – here is the king of creation, entering his city as Messiah – do you recognise him still?
- Our current situation?
 - Do we need a large public gesture to indicate that God is in control?
 - Will your palm, (blessed and available from outside the Barn or St Luke's on Sunday morning) which is an object to hold, to treasure, help at all in these troubled times?
 - Do we have confidence in the God of the Universe?
 - The phrases shouted by the crowd we usually sing during the Eucharistic Prayer. We are unable to share communion together on this great day – does a palm cross fill the gap?

To review:

- Christ enters Jerusalem as a new sort of King, a Messiah who is humble yet controls the universe
- This is not a spontaneous outpouring of praise: it is a carefully choreographed event, fulfilling prophecy and carefully timed to coincide with Passover preparations and celebrations
- It is a spiritual moment, that has deep political and social consequences that are hard to ignore, even in the excitement of the event

- Reading and studying it again ought to lift our spirits and inspire us to prayer and worship, whatever our current circumstances

Prayer

Glorious God, King of the Universe, accept our praise and adoration as we worship you, the source of life and love, beauty and joy. Keep us forever safe in your unfailing love and lead us ever deeper into your extraordinary presence. Amen.

Fr Peter 3.4.2020