

. Sermon for Palm Sunday 9am Service 13 April 2025 at Holy Trinity

*Texts: Isaiah 50.4-9a; Philippians 2.5-11; Luke 19.28-40*

**“I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out” (Luke 19.40)**

Earlier this week at our final Lent lunch Humberto Henderson spoke to us about peace. To be more precise, he described to us the issues and complexities of making peace in our world – a world in which there are currently 22 conflicts which are classified as wars as well as many other smaller conflicts taking place. But behind the deep complexities of the peace-making processes particularly those of the United Nations, lies a fundamental question. That question is how much do we want peace and flowing from this, how far are we prepared to do in order to create a lasting peace based on justice and mercy?

Today, on Palm Sunday, which is the start of Holy Week, we are celebrating Jesus' triumphant journey to Jerusalem where his ministry is going to reach its climax. But it is also the day when we glimpse the costliness of his ministry and in turn, the radical choice which faced those who accompanied him. We too are faced with that radical choice and it is this that I particularly wish to explore in my sermon today.

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is a prophetic act. On one level, it is the proclamation of his role as Messiah – a fulfilment of the words of the prophet Zechariah:

*‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, you daughter Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt,  
the foal of a donkey’ (Zechariah 9.9)*

But it is also an act which calls for a response, a clear decision from those who witness it. Jesus' prophetic witness as he approaches Jerusalem riding on the colt is the ultimate act of witness of all the prophets who had preceded him proclaiming God's call for the people to repent, and to seek reconciliation with Him and with each other based on justice and mercy.

We know also that for all the true prophets who proclaimed this message of God in their different times and contexts, that it was immensely costly. The prophet Isaiah in one of the so-called ‘Servant Songs’, speaks of the isolation, loneliness and contempt which the prophet faces as a voice speaking out for God's justice and mercy, in a world which simply does not wish to hear and instead, tries to suppress that voice.

During his ministry, in those three years Jesus had spent with his disciples, healing the sick, performing miracles and teaching about God, Jesus had revealed to those

who would hear, the nature of God and His love for us. He had also shown through this, what it means or could mean to live as true human beings – that is, by living in obedience to God and showing God’s character of righteous, justice and mercy in our relations with each other.

For Jesus, that obedience to God and living out of what it means to be truly human will lead him to offer himself for us on the Cross. In that act, as St Paul describes in his letter to the Christian community at Philippi, we are led into the very heart of the incarnation and what it means for us.

For he describes how Christ Jesus was in the form of God. The Greek word ‘morphe’ literally means of the same essence of God – it never changes. Those of you who have been following the course on the Nicene Creed during Lent will see where St Paul is coming from. He is showing us that Jesus was one with God as His Son within the Trinity, Yet He laid all this aside in order to enter totally into our world, into our human condition as a human being, He came in absolute humility showing us what it means to live as true humanity and bringing that to fulfilment through his death on the Cross.

Now, through the prophetic act of his procession to Jerusalem riding on a colt, Jesus is proclaiming that his ministry is reaching its climax. This is the time when people need to decide how they will respond. Each of the gospel writers tell the story of Palm Sunday in a slightly different way and in St Luke’s account, there are interesting details which show us that some people have already made that decision.

For in St Luke’s account, it is not the crowd who acclaim Jesus in the triumphant words of psalm 118.26 ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’ . They join in with the excitement at the start, spreading their cloaks on the ground before him but they do not commit themselves. Instead, it is those whom St Luke describes as ‘a whole multitude of his disciples’ who acclaim him. These are the men and women who have experienced his ministry at first hand, and now welcome him.

For others, their reaction to the disciples’ joyful acclamation of Jesus as king is not one of joy but anger and fear. They are terrified that if the Romans learn of this, they will intervene with brutal suppression which could threaten both the Temple and civil status quo in Jerusalem. So, they urge Jesus to tell the disciples to stop. They have made their choice and clearly rejected him. There is too much at stake for them.

But Jesus responds to them quoting words from the prophet Habakkuk, (2.11)

*“I tell you, if these were silent, the stones themselves would shout out”.*

These words express that what is happening, the coming of the Lord’s Messiah to his city, is so momentous that the joyful proclamation of this event cannot be suppressed. But in quoting the prophet Habakkuk, Jesus is also giving a warning. For as the prophet Habakkuk declares, the very stones of Jerusalem cry out against

injustice, cruelty and corruption which is taking place and warns that God's judgment will follow.

We see this taken further as Jesus approaches Jerusalem. In St Luke's account, Jesus does not enter the city triumphantly. Instead, he stops, looks down at the city and weeps over it. He weeps because the people have had the opportunity to seek and choose the path of peace but instead have chosen to continue in the way of injustice, oppression and corruption which will lead to their destruction and that of the city.

At this moment, we glimpse the depth of God's love. God in Jesus, weeps for us, his people. Despite all that Jesus has shown them through his three years on ministry of God's overwhelming love, his call for repentance and forgiveness and how to live as children of God in peace, they have turned their back and said "no".

Today as we follow Jesus in his journey to Jerusalem, we too face a radical choice. How far if at all, are we prepared to go with him? The Pharisees urged his followers to be silent for fear that their message would upset the political and religious status quo. Are we willing to stand up for Jesus? To stand against the oppression and marginalisation of people in our own community or does that put us in an uncomfortable place?

The crowd spread their cloaks but were not prepared to go further. How far do we too make the symbolic gesture towards peace, and justice, yet recoil when we see how much it will cost us.

The disciples do follow Jesus and are there with him in that last intense week of his earthly life. During this time, he taught in the Temple, challenging the religious leaders and urging them and all who would listen to repent and turn to God. Yet at the end, the religious leaders turn on him and order his execution whilst almost all his followers run away in fear and confusion. How far are we willing to follow the path of Jesus in the way of the Cross? How far are we willing to live out the way of love and mercy? Are we prepared to forgive others and to take the costly and difficult steps towards reconciliation with those who have hurt us?

The little choices which we make in all these areas may seem tiny on a global scale and in the context of the wars and conflicts which are ripping our world apart. Yet each step we take in the way that Jesus has modelled for us, which leads to our standing up against injustice and oppression, to show mercy, to forgive, to be bridge-builders for reconciliation, does make a difference. For they show on a micro-scale, that another way of living together as human beings in this world *is* possible; a way rooted on the life-giving values of God's kingdom.

**Amen**

**Canon Daphne Green**