

“Walking With Jesus: The Road To Jerusalem”

28 March 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 360 What A Wonderful Saviour

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Luke 19:28-44

Sermon:

We begin our reflections at Easter with a short series on walking with Jesus. Many of us are walking, because it's all we can do in the present Covid restrictions. And we have discovered it is a great thing - exploring new areas of our locality, seeing buildings in a fresh light, giving thanks for a well-maintained park, or the generosity of, say, UCD for allowing us access to their magnificent grounds. It is, of course, good to walk with others, and Karen and I have certainly enjoyed walking together, even if I go too slow for her.

We usually walk with a purpose - to get somewhere, to exercise, to explore, to protest, to visit, to celebrate, to make the 10,000 steps. Today is Palm Sunday, and we are walking with Jesus as He approaches Jerusalem. We are with Him in the small villages of Bethphage and Bethany, about 3 kms from Jerusalem. We are close to His entourage and we are going to take in the reality of all that we see and experience. A mood has gripped the crowd and we are hugely excited, shouting and singing Jesus' praise, waving our palm branches, throwing our cloaks on the donkey as He rides along the road to Jerusalem. We have just taken our photo of the event and posted it to Instagram and Twitter with a short message: "walking with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, celebrating His presence and singing His praise!" So, let us explore this amazing picture of our experience, of walking with Jesus.

I. Jesus is King, Victorious and Bringing Peace

As a supporter of Manchester City Football Club, the dream of winning four competitions is before us. If that happens and they win the Premier League, the Carabao Cup, the FA Cup and the Champions League, there will be a victory parade sometime in Manchester. It will be a time to celebrate, to praise the team and the manager, and to follow along with them in their glory. Hopefully, we will soon get back to church building, the Coronavirus having been suppressed and most of us having received the vaccine. That will also be a time for rejoicing, for celebration, for coming together, singing and shouting without hindrance.

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, the people are shouting and singing, "*blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.*" The NIV Bible calls it, "*The Triumphal Entry*". So, Jesus is the king being carried into Jerusalem, the royal city of David, on a donkey. His arrival is remarkable and there are many things worth exploring in our picture that prove He was indeed the King, victorious and bringing peace.

A. Prophesied

Predicting the future is an important aspect of prophecy. Further back in the journey, 27 kms away in the city of Jericho, Jesus said these remarkable words to His disciples: "*We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything written by the prophets*

about the Son of Man will be fulfilled" (Luke 18:21). Jesus called Himself "the Son of Man" many times and it was an outrageous claim, because it alludes to a vision experienced by the prophet Daniel of a heavenly king, who comes with power and authority. It was a claim to deity and annoyed the Jewish leaders who understood its significance; it was the reason why He was ultimately tried for blasphemy.

The prophet Zechariah, who lived 520 years before Jesus was born, said, "*See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*" (Zechariah 9:9). This is what we are seeing today. The prophet Zechariah goes on to prophesy about what Jesus would do. He was to proclaim peace to the nations: "*I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth*" (v.10).

Zechariah said the son of man - Jesus - would come as King to us, having done what was right, having salvation, but gentle and riding on a donkey. He would bring peace to all the nations of the earth. It was a wonderful prophecy and it is being lived out before us as we walk with Jesus into Jerusalem. What was prophesied has come true; Jesus, the King, rides on a donkey in victory, but gently, bringing salvation and peace into Jerusalem.

B. Proved

Ok, so Zechariah foretold the picture 520 years before it happened, but how can we be sure that Jesus is the one? It might be an elaborate and well-planned video take. It could be "fake news". However, there is more remarkable evidence, researched by Luke and presented to us here, about the authenticity of Jesus the King and Saviour of all. Let us look again at the picture.

The colt. Note how Jesus asks for the colt. It was strange; He appears to have just taken it with the words, "*The Lord needs it*" (v.31). He appears to believe it belongs to Him and His subjects are duty-bound to give it to their Lord. Only if He was truly their King would that happen, and they would obey Him. The way He asked for it is evidence that He was a king! Next, and amazingly, this little colt who had never been ridden before allows Jesus to sit on him; the colt offered no resistance. During lockdown, I have been watching with Karen a Netflix series called *Heartland*, all about horses in Canada. The one thing that does *not* happen is a human being just sitting on a horse that has never been ridden before; they must be broken, tamed or gentled first. Jesus is riding on a previously unriden colt; His control extends to all creation. As God, He is the king of everything in creation.

Kings usually ride on great white or black horses as a sign of their power and authority, but Jesus rides on a colt as a sign that, indeed, He comes in peace to bring peace. Our picture of Jesus riding on the colt is a special picture of who Jesus is and the type of rule He brings. The fact this colt was unriden yet submitted to Him, the authority of the statement "*the Lord needs it*", His humility of riding a colt, a donkey, and not a magnificent horse - this is the evidence of who Jesus is and what He came to do, the gentle King of all creation.

The cloaks. We honour people by rolling out the red carpet; in those days, kings were honoured by people who put cloaks on the ground in front of them. It was a spontaneous gesture of reverence and respect towards their king.

The choir. Singing started spontaneously, like a flash mob! What and why were they singing? They are singing Old Testament references to King David. *“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord,”* a quote from Psalm 118, the divine worship book, written in praise of their King, God’s king. They sing and confirm His mission of peace. *“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.”* In v.42, Jesus confirms that He has come to bring peace. *“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace.”* Peace is about wellbeing and wholeness, the Hebrew word *shalom*, and it is all about being in a right relationship with God, through Jesus, by repentance and faith. It is something worth shouting and singing about. The King of heaven has arrived and He has come in peace to bring peace with God. The choir makes public something Jesus had tried to keep under wraps for most of His ministry; now, it is declared. He goes public, we might say. His time has come!

The miracles. What evidence convinced them He was a divine King? They were convinced (v.37) by the miracles Jesus had done, many miracles in number and variety. Remarkable healings, incredible control of nature, walking on water, turning water into wine, insight into people’s thoughts and needs, control of evil spirits, speaking to the dead and raising them to life - the miracles confirmed that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised King.

II. Responses and Implications

If we were to talk about any recent event, it elicits different responses. If I speak to some about Manchester City, they will say something like, “You bought yourselves another title.” Similarly, there are two basic reactions expressed to Jesus, and His response to these reactions shows that how we respond to Him is vitally important and has serious consequences.

A. Rebuke and Reject

In a remarkable response, Jesus declares that if the people didn’t shout and sing about Him, then the stones on the ground would cry out (v.40)! Only the King of all creation could command such a thing! However, His dominant response to those rebuking and rejecting Him is that He weeps for them, literally “wails” (v.41). Listen to His heart-breaking words: *“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you **peace** ... but you did not recognise the time of God’s coming to you.”* Jesus cares deeply for those He created, for those He came to save, and He cries over them as He weeps over the city.

His words, as originally spoken, are directed towards the leaders of Judaism. He uses the word “you” twelve times in v.40-44, just five verses, highlighting that the rejection is personal. To reject Jesus is personal to Him and the consequences will also be personal. Jesus is King and anyone who rejects Jesus as their King will be judged by Him as King. There are eternal consequences and Jesus understood that reality better than anyone. His words of warning were not idle threats (v.43-4). The centre of Jewish religion and faith, the great temple in Jerusalem, was encircled and an embankment built against it, the people within the city were murdered, and the great temple was ransacked and destroyed, so that not one stone was left standing

on another. The prophets had also warned of what would happen (Isaiah 29:3; Jeremiah 6:6; Ezekiel 4:2, 26:8); their prophecies and Jesus' warning came true in the year AD 70, when the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and murdered many, an event also confirmed by Josephus, the Jewish historian.

Judgement, Jesus believed, was something to cry over. The Jewish leaders were culpable because of everything they had seen and heard. They had rejected the evidence of the Old Testament prophets and they had rejected the evidence of the colt, the cloaks and the choir. They had rejected the evidence of the miracles performed by Jesus in the course of His ministry, and that rejection of someone who loved them and was coming to Jerusalem to die for their forgiveness and its consequences was a reason to cry bitterly. We have the same evidence and the further outworking of the story of Jesus' life - death, resurrection, and ascension. Let us not reject all we have heard and seen.

B. Some recognise and rejoice!

When Jesus is recognised as our King who comes to save and to bring peace, acceptance of that truth leads believers to praise God for all He has done. Jesus is a gentle, righteous Saviour, victorious over sin and death. Many of the Jews *did* recognise Him to be the Messiah, their King, and sang His praise.

But what is our response? We know this well known story of Palm Sunday. The question is, do we recognise Jesus as our King and saviour? He is alive, risen, and ascended and He continues to speak. Therefore, you are the "you" He speaks to. *"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace. . ."* Jesus comes today and offers you peace through His blood shed on the cross. He offers peace with God through the forgiveness of your sins. He comes for *you*. If He has opened your eyes, if you see the picture clearly and recognise who He is and why He has come, then *now* is the time, the time to say yes to Him, to repent and believe.

Secondly, the apostle Paul told the church in Corinth in his letter to them, *"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him"* (2 Corinthians 2:14). He is confident that Jesus continues to lead us as He walks with us through life, including life's tough times. Indeed, He walks with us gently, leading us to victory in heaven. Palm Sunday was the time when God had come to them in Jesus, the King, who comes in peace to bring peace (v.44). It was a time to believe and rejoice; it was a time to make a choice. It still is the time. Today is the day. *"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Walking With Jesus: Rachel's story

The 2018-2019 Academic Year was a very difficult and trying year for me in my workplace. I went through some deeply distressing experiences where I felt accused, betrayed, demeaned, and isolated. I felt alone, very hurt, and emotional. I couldn't work in the condition that I was in. I had to take some time off work to think and reflect on how to go forward. I stayed home for three weeks without pay, which added to my worries because I had rent, bills, and school fees to pay. Worried and very anxious, I cried to God, begging for His help and He made me understand that some problems are to be shared.

I decided to share my worries with the church, with Reverend Sam and Karen, Elder Tommy, and Ray. A Prayer Group was formed focusing on my prayer needs. This was a life-changing moment for me as day by day I felt God's Presence; His Strength and Comfort within me. Once again, I could eat and sleep at night. I knew God was with me and on my side. I know now that was the Holy Spirit walking with me. His Presence gave me the strength and confidence to return to work, believing in the Power of Truth. Reverend Sam came with me to the Disciplinary Meeting. After the meeting, I remember him saying, "Rachel, this is bigger than us. We need God's intervention and His miracle." And so that is what we prayed for - "God's Intervention and His Miracle". As we continued to pray week after week, my worries and anxiety were replaced with peace and a growing faith in God, trusting in His Power to intervene and His Power to work Miracles. And He did intervene! By the end of the 2019 Academic Year, justice and truth prevailed and I was vindicated. Jeremiah 51:10 says, *"The Lord has vindicated us; come, let us tell in Zion what the Lord our God has done."* What happened in my Workplace was the manifestation of God's Power, and when we shared with the whole church how God had answered our prayers, we were able to praise Him and give thanks together.

Seeing His Work in my own life, seeing first-hand the Power of Prayer, has strengthened my growing faith in Him. I now take the time to worship, praise and thank God, to reflect on His Love, seeing all the different ways that He has walked and is walking with me and my family, protecting us, and intervening in our lives. It has inspired me to join a 3D group, to fellowship with other church members and learn more about His gospel. My faith in Him continues to grow as I see and feel His Presence not only in my life but also in my Workplace, where things continue to change for the better. I see the difference in the New Management, showing Understanding, Appreciation and Gratitude to employees, especially during these challenging times of COVID-19. God uses us in different ways to show His Power and to spread His Message. The book of Proverbs teaches us that we should not let fear overwhelm us but let faith rule us. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will direct your paths"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Praise: Christ Is Mine Forevermore

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: IPH 449 Crown Him With Many Crowns

Benediction: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Romans 15:13)

Discussion & Application:

Discuss walking as a metaphor for the Christian life.

What evidence is there in the Palm Sunday story to prove Jesus is the Messiah (Saviour)?

Consider the responses in the passage to Jesus. What challenge does that bring to "you"?