

Psalm Sunday

Luke 19:28-44

Introduction

Palm Sunday often feels like Easter Sunday. On Easter Sunday, we celebrate the Risen Lord; on Palm Sunday the King who rides into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, symbolising that he comes in peace. Both Sunday services are often celebratory but Palm Sunday leads to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday before Easter Sunday. Luke's account deliberately causes unease in the reader, there something sinister afoot amidst the waving of palm branches.

Jesus approaches (to be rejected)

Luke tells this story a little differently than the other synoptic gospel writers Matthew and Mark, they describe Jesus riding toward and within Jerusalem. The description in Luke only takes us toward Jerusalem. Even after the crowd have been praising Jesus, Luke records (vs 40) **As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city.**

Jerusalem isn't the place where he will be welcomed as king. Rather as Walter Liefeld points out *'Luke emphasizes that he is moving instead to the place of his rejection.'*

The rejection of Jesus can be followed throughout the Gospel of Luke

After Jesus preaching a powerful message in his hometown synagogue Luke records. **'They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff.'** (4:29)

Later, during his ministry, when talking about the Messiah's coming, Jesus said of himself. **'But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.'** (17:25)

Most terribly Jesus is rejected on the day of his crucifixion. **'But the whole crowd shouted, 'Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!' ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)'** (23:17)

Palm Sunday at first glance looks like a celebration, but if you linger, you will read it as a tragedy; the prelude to the ultimate rejection. All isn't right and Luke makes sure that we know that, hence he doesn't take us into Jerusalem. Instead, Luke leaves us at the gate, knocking on the door. Waiting for the unfolding of what comes next.

The crowd praises

The crowd here is what ever we need to be.

John Wesley astutely points out *'the whole multitude began to praise God – speaking at once, as it seems, from a divine impulse, words which most of them did not understand'*

Webber and Rice's 'Jesus Christ Superstar', picks up something similar. The people are waving their palm branches and following Jesus, enjoying the moment of

exuberant praise. Jesus too is smiling as they walk and sing, then there is a freeze, an image of Jesus, captured as he hears amongst the praise, 'hey JC will you die for me', which returns to the hosannas; as though it wasn't sung.

Wesley continues commenting on the Pharisees request of vs 39 with 40 who **'said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'**

'If these should hold their peace, the stones, which lie before you, would cry out – that is, God would raise up some still more unlikely instruments to declare his praise'

The irony is that these people had the Messiah in their midst. They sing to their heart's content, but Luke wants us to be aware that the whole thing is a bit off key. The praise comes from excitement, not loving devotion. It is not wrong to praise God because we are excited by life, but if it's the only reason, it's too shallow.

The harsh truth is that, it might as well have been the stones, that raised their voice in praise to God. The crowd's heart was little different in composition, to the stones on the ground.

That's the point that Luke is making here, the crowd is fickle. Wesley reads it that way too, and we must listen carefully. Where are we positioned on this journey with Jesus?

The people turn away

Luke symbolically describes Jesus, riding toward Jerusalem. In love, Jesus moves toward rejection.

We began today's service, listening to parts of Psalm 118 from the GNB. What happened to the stone in verse 22? **The stone which the builders rejected as worthless, turned out to be the most important of all.**

God's chosen one was rejected, in the first chapter of John's Gospel, reading from the New Living Translation it says, **He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him.** ¹¹ **He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.**

Jesus, for a moment is the rejected one. Rejected by people and more terribly rejected by God. **'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'**. Jesus experiences utter rejection, and in that moment, he experiences the worst thing that can be experienced. Rejection in every way. Holy week describes the detail on Jesus' forsakenness, from a friend's betrayal, to the one who could save him washing his hands of the situation.

Conclusion

Where are we in the story?

- Are we welcoming Jesus as he approaches us in the form of friend and neighbour?

- Are we part of the crowd caught up with the excitement around Jesus, the miracle maker?
- Are we turned away from Jesus, our heads in one place but our hearts in another?

Connect groups

Please work through the three questions in the conclusion. Asking firstly, how you might minister to Jesus through the people you meet? The other two questions help us think about responding to Jesus. Secondly, are we, sometimes at least, feelgood followers that struggle to follow when life is a struggle? Thirdly, are our hearts adrift from loving Jesus, looking somewhere else for the need that only faith in Jesus can fulfil?