

Matthew 21 – Palm Sunday 2017 – Charlie Boyle

The Big Praise – shouting and singing and stirring

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, the age of foolishness, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way....so go the opening words of the *Tale of two cities* by Charles Dickens, written depicting his version of French revolution.

And I thought in this time of spring, when many of us gravitate to the sea, the sun and the beach, against a backdrop of another terror atrocity, this time in Stockholm, less than two weeks after the Westminster Bridge attacks, stirring up memories of the attacks in Nice and Berlin. These words are very appropriate and have much in common with what is going on here in this passage for Palm Sunday. A time of praise and celebration, in contrast to what we know unfolds later in the week. The Good Friday crucifixion followed by the Resurrection. But life is like that good times, followed by bad. Hope followed by despair. Light followed by dark.

Introduction: A "Palm Leaf" is the symbol of both "Peace" and "Victory" but also the cross. Today begins' what we now call "Holy Week", it starts with "Palm Sunday". This week is so important that three of the Gospel writers [*Matthew, Mark, and Luke*] devoted a full third of their contents to reporting this week, and the fourth [*John*] dedicates its entire last half to reporting this week. Easter and the events leading up to it are more important for the gospel writers and Christians than the birth of Christ. In many ways Easter is what defines the Christian faith, the belief in the resurrection, the eternal life to come, marks us apart from other faiths.

This is the big move – for Jesus. As we prepare to celebrate Easter – what is moving us, what are we shouting about, what has God placed on our hearts? What is stirring us?

Is it the appalling atrocities we witness on our TV screens of children being gassed in Syria...the situation of desperation in South Sudan and Africa...? Or simply the arrival of sunnier times with special times on the beach...

Early Sunday morning Jesus made his public entry into the city. This was the end of all privacy and safety, and the beginning of what would be an inevitable collision course with the religious and political authorities, which ultimately lead to his death.

As many of you know I support Arsenal, who finally won a game against West Ham, this week, hopefully we will qualify for the FA Cup final again this year. But for a supporter at times I have been in despair, at times celebrating with joy, like the celebration we heard about in the passage....with arms in the air and cloaks thrown down

However we celebrate is unique to us but let's be quite clear, the Jews greeted Jesus with real joy and raised arms.

How do we celebrate? Do we shout? Do we sing? What is stirring us? What are we doing to step out in faith?

In the text there are **a few** things I want you to notice in the passage today:

1) Step out in faith – Go...not walking but riding – doing things differently

We need to step out in faith as a Church, to for example get out there, promoting, praying for our Alpha course and all that happens here at All Saints. Remember that Jesus instructed two disciples. To **“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. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away”**

Why was Jesus taking a donkey? To herald stepping out big move, the move from Private to Public. From a safe place to persecution. Normally he walked. It is also unlike Jesus, heralding something different because Jesus normally walked everywhere, so if you want to perhaps be closer to Jesus – why do something different this week. Why not slow your pace down and **walk everywhere you can this week, or step out in faith**. Or take a different mode of transport, **ever since at Lilliput they had a week to encourage getting to school on two wheels, whenever possible Zachary and I ride to school rather than take the car. A great way to start the day on a sunny morning, as well as reducing your carbon footprint**. That would be a good way to prepare for Easter. So let's step out in faith, secondly let's

2) Shout out – let’s sing and praise, as we have been doing this morning

The crowds went ahead of him and those that followed shouted ...Hosanna (come and save us) everyone would have known that something very special was happening, everyone would have told people ...Jesus was coming

- They praised God for all the mighty works they had seen.
- Remember WE read last week, they had seen miracle after miracle, including the raising of Lazarus from the dead.
- The whole atmosphere was electric with excitement and expectation. How are you when you are excited? Do you raise your hands up? Clap? Shout? As at a football match ...rugby....team winning...son or daughter coming 1st in a race...**or perhaps the horse you backed on the Grand National comes in 1st...thump the air with joy** And that is what this joy is like that we see here.
- They knew that Jesus had the power to do anything: He could bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

Yet the people failed to see several things:

- They failed to see that Jesus was riding a colt, coming as the King of Peace. Not in an aggressive, power crazed way with an armed army. Instead he came as a symbol of peace and reconciliation.

The donkey was a sign of his humility and type of revolution, one not based on force but on peace. The Old Testament prophet Zechariah had foretold of this arrival of the Messianic King in Jerusalem via the humble conveyance of a colt. He does not ride on a majestic mighty stallion but a humble donkey, to fulfil what the prophet said “**see your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey.**” He comes as a King. Jesus in contrast to the expectation to overthrow the Roman regime, **comes with humility** not an aggressive show of force like **Trump has been showing in Syria.**

So in conclusion

We need to step out in faith

We need to shout out

We need to see what is stirring out hearts

COULD STOP HERE....

We need to step out in faith

go ...move.... We need to be prepared to be generous like the people who supplied the Colt to Jesus? We need to prepare to serve him sacrificially? We need to prepare ourselves for service in a humble way like Jesus not aggressive dominance. To be people of sacrifice not privilege. To be people of humility. Are we prepared to make sacrifices for what we believe in? How are you preparing yourselves and your family for Easter?

We need to shout out A bit like when your football team, or any other team that you are fanatic about, and a genuine fan of, scores a goal or wins a victory, there is a real sense of joy and ecstasy.

We **need to be stirred up** like Jesus' followers...**When Jesus entered Jerusalem the whole city was stirred....** Let us dream...together of what might be...dream of possibilities, of what might be here on earth but also in the future in eternity

Conclusion

Let us pray

Jesus Christ is the head of his church; he is calling his church to celebration, to declare his name, to serve him with our whole hearts.

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in Heaven and glory in the highest!

Amen.