



Luke 19.28-40

Palm Sunday 28th March 2010

- Jesus finally arrives in Jerusalem
- Enters on a donkey in a joyful, spontaneous procession
- Or was it spontaneous?

Spontaneous?

- The Timing – The beginning of Passover week. What did Passover commemorate? The Exodus when Israel set free from slavery under the Egyptians. We need to know how terrible conditions were under Roman occupation, how the people longed for a New Exodus, a new Moses/David to lead and save them. Jesus timed his arrival carefully.
- The other procession – The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that the Romans were also aware of the significance of Passover and the danger of big crowds with expectations, and so they would bring a company of soldiers into Jerusalem *at the start of the week* and post them on and around the Temple walls. As Jesus came in from the East, the Romans would be coming in from the West, carrying their weapons and their Standards, featuring effigies of Caesar and other idolatrous images.
- The Prophecy – Zechariah 9.9 “*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*” Jesus was careful to fulfill the details of the prophecy. Actions speak louder than words and his actions were saying “I am the king”.
- Far from being spontaneous, Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was a deliberate mirror of the procession on the other side of the city and a provocative challenge to the authority of the Romans and the Jewish leaders who collaborated with them.

A Different kind of King

- Jesus was not just claiming to be an *alternative* king but a completely *different kind* of king.
- Zechariah had prophesied this too, after the bit about the donkey: *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. As for you, because of the blood of*



- *my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.* (Zech 9.10-11)
- Zechariah is prophesying a radical change in the way power is exercised in the world. God's reign will be a reign of peace including all nations, all races, all the lands of the world. The one who brings this new kingdom will not do so by using superior force and destroying his enemies but by shedding his own blood, yielding his own life to redeem the captives from their captivity.
- Ironically, the Emperor Augustus (who reigned until about 14AD) had claimed to be the Saviour of the world who had established peace for the nations. He demanded tribute and even worship from all people in the known world. But he had achieved and maintained power through violence and terror and his claims were false in contrast to the humble king, Jesus.

An important contrast

- The contrast between the way of the world and the way of Christ is such a strong emphasis in scripture that we should be suspicious of some popular versions of the Christian story which tell us that there will be a Second Coming of Christ in which we will see a very different side of Jesus, characterized by violence, killing, domination and everlasting torture. Very similar to the Empire of Caesar and many other human Empires.
- If this understanding were true, what on earth would be the point of the first coming of Jesus; the nonviolent Jesus who *confronted* those who abused their power, who *freed* people from disease and evil spirits, who *loved* his enemies and taught us to do the same? Was he just faking it to draw people into a false sense of security? I don't think so!
- We need to get back to the Jesus of the gospels, to his message of the kingdom of God, if we want to escape the cycles of violence in our world. Martin Luther King saw this clearly and he wrote: *The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. The chain of evil – hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars – must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.* (Strength to Love, 1963)
- We need saving from ourselves, from our sinful instincts. We need to cry out 'HOSANNA', which doesn't mean 'Hurray' it means 'SAVE US NOW!' As Jesus entered Jerusalem the crowd also cried 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord' (quoting Psalm 118), and they were right. Although he came humbly, Jesus was and is the true king and saviour of the world.



St George's Church
BARCELONA

Conclusion

- Some put their faith in Jesus but many rejected him. We are faced with the same choice today, the choice of which procession to join.
- Will we march with the worldly kingdom with all its financial and military power? Or will we risk joining the carnival on the other side of town and commit ourselves to following the humble king, helping to bring his kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven?