Palm Sunday

It would be appropriate to speak about palms, processions, donkeys, and the paraphernalia of Palm Sunday. But you know the story well enough. So I will invite you to think about the greater importance of today in the Christian story.

Jesus was making His way with the disciples from Jericho to Jerusalem. He always taught them as they went along. Bits of conversation and discussion. A good way to teach. But what was uppermost in their minds was why were they heading for Jerusalem? They seemed to be walking into trouble. They were.

Jesus tells them plainly. He spells it out from His arrest to His crucifixion in every detail.

It was a very bold thing to do. If you were one of the disciples, you would have been greatly shaken." Is He out of His mind?   And what about us? We have given up everything to follow Him? This is foolhardy, and we ought to stop Him".

You would be thinking things like that.

"And as for this Kingdom He talks about? It's all pie in the sky. His death will put paid to all that, surely?"

All this caused quite an upset among the disciples and those who had joined them on the way. They had come to terms with what Jesus said about God 's Kingdom. They trusted Him when He said they would all have a part in it -whatever ‘it’ turned out to be. But they all began again thinking of themselves. Who would be greatest? Who would be least, in the pecking order?

Oh dear. This talk Jesus had had with them on the road had really upset the applecart.

Jesus was not fazed. He has to try again to show them what His kingship and kingdom is like.

So they get to Emmaus, where Jesus had raised Lazarus from the tomb. He tells two of His disciples to go into the village and bring a donkey and her foal, which they will find tethered. They do this. Jesus is seated astride the donkey. They set off again for the last two miles to Jerusalem. The word gets around quickly. People come and spread branches and clothing on the road. They strip the palm branches and wave them, calling out Hosanna.

What message does this give? Two messages.

First, the humility of Jesus. Kings in those days would ride on horseback. They would be surrounded by chariots, other horsemen, and foot soldiers, rather like our modern processions down the Mall.  Then, of course, there would be all the paraphernalia of Royal occasions. The Romans in our Lord's day were good at this kind of thing.

Now, contrast that with the picture in your mind of Jesus on the donkey, with the disciples on either side of Him, and a motley crowd straggling behind, waving branches from the trees and pieces of clothing. No pomp and ceremony here. People enjoying themselves, but the person at the centre of it all, on the donkey's back, a picture of humility.

During the next five days, I hope you will read the Holy Week story in your New Testament.  You will see the kingship of Jesus writ large in this humility of His. There He stands humbly before Pilate, priests, and people; He takes all the indignity, hatred, and hurt they heap on Him.

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The second message: This kingdom of which Jesus spoke wasn't anything like they imagined. No coronation in Jerusalem. Rather a crucifixion outside the city wall. No court and courtiers, but just a crowd getting larger and larger. It looked to many as though it was all over. In fact, it was just beginning with Jesus and would continue after the week's events. There would be the most astonishing climax and a massive thrust to the inauguration of the Kingdom.

For the moment, Palm Sunday was an anti-climax. The straggling crowd around Jesus and the donkey began to grow in those two miles to Jerusalem. By the end of the day the crowd was large. The word had got around. There was going to be a religious upset between Jesus and the High Priests: people knew there would be a political side to it and a run in with Pilate. In the next day or so, everybody was involved. That small group had become a great, mixed crowd - those who were committed to Jesus, those who stood on the outside to see what would happen, those who wished Jesus well but didn't want to get involved, and those would be glad at His misfortune. They make up every crowd. We too belong to that crowd - from the handful behind the donkey, to an estimated **2.2 billion** Christians around the world. We are building the kingdom, in the power and strength of Our Lord. We are the kingdom of Easter people who are trying to bring love and joy and peace to God's world - to our world.

**Stand with that crowd today, and everyday this Holy Week. The last chapters of any of the four gospels will put you in the picture. Read them. Think about them.**

**Let this Holy Week be different.**

**Go with the crowd.**

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