



Palm Sunday

w/c 10 April 2022

"Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die; O Christ, thy triumphs now begin, o'er captive death and conquered sin." (Henry Hart Milman)

Read Luke 19:28-40

Pause for a moment: how do you visualise the events outlined here? As typically depicted by the church, there is a road empty except for Jesus and those welcoming him. In reality, they were probably just part of the mass of humanity arriving in Jerusalem for Passover. Scholars currently think that there may have been between 300,000 and 500,000 pilgrims coming to the city for the feast – at a time when its population was no more than perhaps 60,000 (and some would say much lower). With, no doubt, later arrivals still streaming in, a crowd (as John relates) heading out to the Mount of Olives to welcome Jesus must have led to chaos on the road.

Given that Jesus seems to have gone out of his way to act with humility in this episode, why do think it is traditionally referred to as the "triumphal entry"?

Many of the actions of the day would have carried significant symbolic weight for those present; the very act itself recalled the triumphant entry of the Maccabees¹ some two hundred years earlier. Simon Maccabeus entered Jerusalem *"with a chorus of praise and the waving of palm branches"* (1 Maccabees 13:51). That led directly to a cleansing and rededication of the Temple and the establishment of the festival of Hannukah to recall those actions. Since then palm branches had become symbolic of Jewish nationalism. Jesus, though, decided to ride a donkey with all its associations of peace – see Zechariah 9:9. Spreading cloaks to cover the way for those thought worthy of high honour was an established practice– see 2 Kings 9:13 for an earlier example.

In the contrast between a donkey (an animal of peace) and a horse (denoting a warrior) I am reminded of Marshall McLuhan's words, *"The medium is the message"*. How can we ensure that our message is carried correctly? How often has the good news been lost because of the *way* we have communicated it?

In the verses immediately following on from this passage Luke records Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. What should we weep over today?

Were the crowd perhaps expecting a thoroughgoing re-enactment of Simon Maccabeus' triumphal entrance (which had also featured a cleansing of the Temple – though on that occasion from statues of Greek gods? Disappointed, were these then the same people crying "Crucify him" just a few days later?

How do we sometimes try to subvert Jesus for our own social and political ends when he has an entirely different approach in mind?

In verse 40, Jesus emphasises the necessity of the crowd's acclamation – it may have been a contemporary proverb (see Habakkuk 2:11) rather than intended to be taken literally. Where though do you feel the church is so silent today that 'the very stones' *should* cry out?

"The only way you can serve God is by serving other people." (Rick Warren)

¹ Leaders of a revolt against the Seleucid empire who had controlled Judea in the years following Alexander the Great.