



Sermon

10,000 Reasons

Mark 11:1-11

Palm Sunday 28/3/2021

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They didn't really understand what was happening. Those who gathered to sing and dance, and cheer thought that they were seeing the triumph of the Messiah. But that would occur a few days later. Yet it was a triumph! It was a celebration.

Everyone there knew what Jesus had done. They had heard or seen for themselves the miracles that He had done. They knew of His challenge to the authorities. They had seen His compassion. Above all He awakened hope.

Was this the Messiah? Was now the time when oppression and injustice would end? Were they to see in their day the fulfillment of all the promises that God had given to His people? The answer seemed to be a resounding, "YES".

So, they joined in the parade. They held up their palm branches and waved them. They sang and danced and rejoiced in the God of their salvation. All was going to come right at last and Israel would take its rightful place in the world.

We too must celebrate. We too must see the things that our Master has done in our midst. We too must be reminded again and again that we are privileged to see what God has done and is doing in the world.

We have learned over the past year how important it is to gather in worship. ZOOM is a great gift, and we need to give thanks for it. But it is a very poor second best to the real thing.

We have a son in Dubai. He recently got married and we were able to attend the service via the internet. What amazing technology that enabled us to do that! Yet it left us more with an ache in our heart as we watched the joy on the faces of those who were able to really be there. It was wonderful to be part of it. It was distressing not to be there.

So, with our worship. It was great to be able to join in worship and preach during the last sudden lockdown. It was a special delight for me when in the sharing time after the service members of the congregation added to the things I had said and developed them further. To be part of a fellowship that enhanced the sermon as well as asked some challenging questions was a great experience.

But it wasn't the same. It was good, but when you have experienced the real thing you are very much aware of how much we were missing. Above all else, we couldn't take Communion.

So, celebrate we must, it is part of who we are.

It was and is part of who the Jewish people are. We have inherited it from them.

But it can be so easily misunderstood and misused.

A few years ago, my beloved Mum died aged 101. The funeral was a great celebration of her life. She was a wonderful Mum, Mum-in-Law and Grandmother. Yet there is deep sadness as well. My nephew found it difficult to even come into the Chapel for the service.

At times like that there is always the danger of saying the wrong thing to those grieving most. Celebrating the Resurrection at that moment can be crass in the extreme. Better to say little and give a squeeze of the hand or a hug where appropriate. Let your tears speak.

Christians feel the sharp stab of grief as much as others. We are privileged to know that there is more to life than this life has to offer. As the pain eases, (it never goes away. It is not meant to.) we will once again see the great truths of our Faith and rejoice again in what God has done for us and in us.

We will be able to celebrate again, but now it will have a different feel. Something has been added to it that only comes through pain and suffering. St Paul put it this way: we boast in our sufferings, knowing the suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that He has given to us." (Romans 5: 3-5).

All of this is ahead for the Disciples. Many will change their shouts of joy and delight into shouts of, "Crucify". (The "crowd" is a fickle group to base your hope on.) Others will go away hurting and silent, once again disappointed but not altogether surprised that things hadn't turned out the way they had hoped.

The Apostles will turn away. "We had hoped", was the ache in their hearts. If this man was not the Messiah, what hope is there for any other to be taken seriously.

I have watched people do this. They believe. Tragedy strikes and they turn away, no longer able to trust God's promises. It is very hard to re-awaken people who have taken that fork in the Road.

What is easily forgotten on Palm Sunday is that Jesus came riding a DONKEY. His mode of transport was not that of the rich and powerful as this world understands wealth and power. Jesus will not win the world by force. That has never been His way despite the fact that the People of God have forgotten that many times over the millennia to our great shame.

But it is right that we should celebrate. When we celebrate, let's CELEBRATE. When we come Sunday by Sunday let us expect to see the Master Carpenter at work in our midst. Let us expect that when we meet together, we will also meet with Him. I experienced it right here only a couple of weeks ago.

We were unable to sing because we were in a Level 2 lockdown. Ian had invited us instead to hum along with the singers on screen. I shall never forget the moment. The song had started and then the congregation started to hum the tune. I could not hum. I could barely move as I sensed you all joining in with the only "voice" you were allowed. Nothing prepared me for the wonder of that moment as the worship of earth and the delight of heaven combined to make real what the Psalmist says that "the Lord inhabits the praise of His people. (Psalm 22:3)

Good Friday will be upon us very soon. Easter Saturday is no day to look forward to.

But Easter Sunday is!

We are given the wonderful privilege of knowing that it is coming, and that the World will be changed forever. That is why Christians celebrate. That is why in the Anglican tradition Sunday is always a feast day. That is why Christians constantly trust God even at the worst of times and despite the circumstances. LET'S CELEBRATE and the writer to the Hebrews says, "Let's celebrate together!"