

Introduction

So, it's Palm Sunday and we celebrate it every year.

OR will we remember today as Day 11 of the Covid-19 NZ Lockdown?

I've heard talks and sermons on many Palm Sundays.

So, let's hear the Palm Sunday narrative again and see what we can learn for today.

But first, we need to understand the culture of the time.

“The past is a foreign country,
they do things differently there.

Patricia is going to read the story as told by Matthew.

Read Matt 20:19, 21:1-11

So what's going on here?

This is the stuff of drama.

We know it was near the end of Jesus ministry.

But remember that his disciples and followers had no idea what was up ahead. They were heading to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, even though some of them wondered if it was wise.

Piecing it together from all the gospel accounts, we begin with Jesus and his disciples doing their own version of “self isolation”. John records there was a plot being hatched to kill Jesus, coming out of the High Priest's office in Jerusalem.

John 11:53, 54

So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

54 Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.

But now Jesus and his followers were working their way back to Jerusalem and were leaving Jericho.

Jerusalem was about 25km away, that's about as far as Outram from the Coronation Hall. But not just that. It was also more than 1000m higher than Jericho, which is actually below sea level. A long day's walk in the hot sun. Maybe there was an inn on the way.

Anyway, Jesus and the group were getting near Jerusalem.

What was it like?

Size of Jerusalem in Jesus time.

Old City 220 acres - less than 100 hectares.

Population estimates range from 20,000 to 600,000. Probably around 80-100,000. Smaller than Dunedin and much less spread out.

And as they came near the city Jesus sent for a donkey.
Why? He and the others were nearly there and they had walked the whole way.
There's more to this than sore feet. Jesus was giving a sign to those who could see it.
This is where trying to understand the culture comes in.
In those days a ruler riding into a town could either ride a war horse, in which case the outlook for the city wasn't good, or on a donkey, which meant they were coming in peace.

The crowd seemed to pick up the sign, maybe some of them in part.

A crowd gathers a crowd and it became a welcome party. Waving palm branches, cloaks thrown down on the road. Singing and shouting.
So what did they all shout.
This is important and I looked at all four gospels.

Matthew

'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.

Mark

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Luke

Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!

John

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—
the King of Israel!

I take this as a good representative sample of the crowd's understanding.

They all saw Jesus as coming in the name of the Lord.
That means they recognised him as a genuine messenger from God.

Some saw a prophet.
And some saw a king. But what kind of king?

And so the whole procession came to Jerusalem.

John adds something significant in his account.

John 12:16

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

We'll come back to this.

Now, how does this tie in with the four servant songs of Isaiah.
The four songs highlight
1. The servant's call. God's beloved.

2. The servant's mission. To bring salvation to the ends of the earth
3. The servant's strength. Facing the mission without flinching, with his game face on.
4. The servant's suffering. The prospect of pain.

There may be many ways to view the servant, but Christians see Isaiah's words as pointing to the Messiah, Jesus.

And so far Jesus ticks all the boxes.

And in vv 4, 5 of our reading,

4 This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

5 'Tell the daughter of Zion,

Look, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,

and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

These words aren't Isaiah's. They come from the prophet Zechariah, writing about 200 years after Isaiah.

And now it appears the servant is the king.

What's the difference between a servant and a king?

Kings and Servants.

Jesus comment in Matt 20:25.

'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

But, servants. That's another story.

Matt 8:9

A Roman Centurion

For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go", and he goes, and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this", and the slave does it.'

But servants are not always bottom of the heap.

Our view of the status of kings and servants is probably different

Public servants, Ministers, Prime Minister. All servants

The real question is.... How can a servant be a king?

"to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet". But they didn't get it. Would we?

A quote from Rowan Williams.

"The gospels are full of the statement that Jesus did this or that to fulfil prophecies, as if everybody had really been expecting what was going to happen and when it did people said 'There we are. That's exactly what we expected to happen'. But actually, if you read the stories carefully in the gospels you'll see that the way Jesus fulfills the promises is in fact shocking, difficult and surprising. In spite of all the prophecies people don't quite anticipate what it's really going to be like.

Whatever the various people in the crowd shouted and sang the final outcome was a surprise. Jesus came as a peaceful king but where was the kingdom?

Matt 10:7. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near."

Mark 1:15. 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Luke 17:20,21. Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ... For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.'

John 18:36. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

He talked of the coming kingdom and we try to understand that it exists . now in part and completely in the future when Jesus returns.

What are the implications for us.

They are in Jesus words while he was on the road to Jerusalem. I read part of it earlier. Here's the rest. Maybe this is also prophetic.

'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

And my point to ponder for next week is.

Do we accept Jesus as our King? This means being subject to His rule.

How does that impact our daily lives?

Think about the statement "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant."

And a prayer

King of kings,

We come to serve you,

Lord of lords

We seek to obey you.

(Music of the heart, David Adam, p17, v3)

May God the Father bless us,

May Christ take care of us,

May the Holy Spirit enlighten us
all the days of our life.

The Lord be our Defender,
and Keeper of body and soul,
both now and forever
to the ages of ages.

Amen

(A Celtic Psaltery, David Adam, p125)

Now, over to Hayden.