

Text: Luke 19:28-48

Tuesday 7th April 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Three weeks' ago, we began our journey towards Easter, with Jesus resolutely setting out for Jerusalem. Along the way, we specifically looked at those parts of Luke's gospel where Jesus met with, or spoke about, Samaritans – those people who were outcasts, despised, usually forgotten or ignored by their Jewish neighbours.

But tonight, Jesus reaches Jerusalem, the journey is at an end, yet it has not been easy. He has walked mile after mile, up from Jericho, which is the lowest town on the face of the earth, up through the winding, sandy hills and now He reaches the heights of Jerusalem...

Jesus has crossed through Judean desert, climbing steadily uphill, up what feels like a mountain. It's been dusty, because it's hot and it seldom rains.

But we know that Jesus has chosen this journey **because Luke reminds us that 'After Jesus had [finished teaching], he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.' (v28) Jesus leads the way. This is to be the climax of His story, of His public ministry, and He knows well what lies ahead, yet He sets His face to go and meet it head on.**

About two miles from Jerusalem, Jesus comes to Bethany and Bethphage, a place He has been before, and He sends two disciples ahead to acquire a donkey for the final portion of the journey. Likely this has been arranged ahead of time...

And with it all going according to how Jesus says it would, He can now enter Jerusalem.

As He does so, the people start to lay down **their cloaks on the ground for Jesus to walk on, for His donkey to walk on. It seems a bit strange to us, but there's a story in the Old Testament, 2nd Kings chapter 9, where the new king, Jehu, is welcomed into Jerusalem by people doing the very same thing.**

And as the crowds lay their cloaks before Jesus, we start to hear a chant, a song, rise up upon their lips – we start to hear the crowd say **things like, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' (v38)**

They clearly think Jesus is the King that God had promised to send, the King who would make the world a better place. So, they sing an old song, Psalm 118, it's a song of victory, a hymn of praise to the God who establishes His kingdom upon the earth.

As I said on Sunday, in all of this, Luke is trying to help us see something about Jesus; we're meant to see that Jesus is the King, the Messiah, that God promised, and that this King has certain characteristics.

He is a King who has power and authority; that comes across in a number of ways. In v31, the reason to give for the request of the donkey, is that 'The Lord needs it.' God needs it, and that Lord, that God, is Jesus.

What is more, we know from v30, that this animal has never been ridden before, you would think it would just throw off a backwater carpenter and rabbi. But low and behold, no such thing is recorded, we're meant to see that Jesus is King of all creation, including what might be otherwise wild and untameable.

On top of this, the particular reason given for the crowds believing Jesus to be the promised King is spelled out for us **in v37**: 'the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.' Countless miracles, things beyond explanation, things only the promised Messiah, the promised King, could do, because He came in the name and power of God.

It's because Jesus is such a King, that even though some of the Pharisees object in v39, even then, Jesus says the praise of the disciples is fitting because otherwise the stones would cry out in praise themselves! Jesus is due praise even from the inanimate parts of creation, such is His right and claim. I think we're meant to see in Jesus a King who has power and authority.

But, as I said on Sunday, that's not all we see of Jesus, for we see Him entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Not the grand animal chosen by other kings. **Yet as** the words from Zechariah remind us:

'Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ (Zech. 9:9)

Here Jesus comes, riding on a donkey, for He is humble and lowly – He is the King who comes in humility to serve.

Jesus does so, because He cares. We’ve seen that along the way in the particular stories we’ve focused on: scandalous grace shown to the undeserving; mercy shown to the neighbour whom we might otherwise overlook; abundant generosity for the least, the last and the lost. This is King Jesus, this is the King of kings that Luke has been trying to help us see.

Brothers and sisters, in our time, with what we face, doesn’t this sound like a King whom we all need to know?

And even a King we all need to emulate? In **Jesus we see a King who cares for people**, for people who think they are outcasts and to them He shows scandalous grace. Where do we need to show grace in these days? Who has fallen? Who has not met expectations or seen things as we have? There is grace awaiting from Jesus for them, but is there grace from us?

We've also seen that Jesus cares for people who think they are forgotten or insignificant. I wonder if that's you friends? I wonder, as you sit at home, slowly bouncing off the walls, wondering if someone will call today, because they didn't call yesterday, maybe not even called for the last week, and the thought begins to go around your head – am I forgotten? Am I insignificant? Well, not to Jesus,

not Him, because He came to earth for you, for love of you; to Him you are worth dying for.

And in a world, shaken to its knees by coronavirus, does that world not need to know that Jesus cares for all the nations? That not one is favoured more than another, that there is love and care and concern in His heart for every one, and so none is rejected, all are welcome.

Friends, do you need to know the King of grace, mercy and generosity, whom despite His power and authority, comes close in humility to serve, because He cares for you, for me and for this world? I know I need that King.

Nevertheless, in every age, in every decade, indeed in every life, **events arise that question this**. In fact, at the time, people questioned this.

We read tonight of some Pharisees in the crowd, who just could not see this of Jesus and so they call out to Jesus to rebuke His disciples for what they say of Him. To these Pharisees it sounds irrational, it sounds dangerous in fact, because it sounds like the kind of thing which will disturb the peace, for it might catch the attention of the Romans and get the Jewish nation in trouble. These Pharisees would rather hush up Jesus and keep the peace, than see Him for who He truly is. They question the claims of Jesus.

But other people also questioned, even rejected Jesus, at the time. At the end of our reading tonight, the chief priests, teachers of the law and leaders want to kill Jesus. The time has come; He's gone too far, they're thinking to themselves: "who does this upstart, backwater rabbi think He is? The stories about Him cannot be true; it's just

a placebo for the masses; folk tales and wild fantasy. We know the truth,” they say, “we know how the world works, and Jesus does not feature in it.” These folks also questioned the claims of Jesus.

In our day, understandably I might add, people question the claims of Jesus. Amid coronavirus, we might all question the claims of Jesus. Is He really King? Really?

The claim of Christianity that Jesus is King is as confounding as a King who rides on a donkey. But Jesus did it then, He does it now; He does things that just don't make sense to us, and in the midst of it, He asks us: who do you say I am? And will you follow me?

You see, in the account we read tonight, it's all about Jesus and what our response to Him is. Some question and reject, as we've seen. **Others appear to welcome Jesus**, there's the great crowd who gather round and join the celebrations. But in reality, these folks have simply got caught up in the moment; they're going along for the trip, hoping Jesus will fulfil some of their hopes and desires. They're happy to sing the songs of praise, but only as long as Jesus retains the potential of doing what they want of Him. Because, these same folks, will in a few days' time be shouting: "Crucify! Crucify!"

Nevertheless, there are some who genuinely follow Jesus, they trust Him to be King, to be Messiah, and though the coming week will put them to flight momentarily,...

They still have faith in Him, it's just that their faith needs to mature in substance.

So, I wonder friends, where do we sit? Who are you most like? Is it the Pharisees? Those who can't quite make sense of Jesus. Does the claim that Jesus is King make you feel a bit unsettled and you'd rather keep Him at arms length and not disturb the peace?

Or is it, the religious and political leaders you most feel akin to? Do you know how the world works and Jesus isn't part of the picture, so He is not welcome?

Could you be a member of the crowd? Ready to follow Jesus, but only if He meets your expectations?

Or, are you a disciple? Have you come to that point, where you know, deep down, that Jesus is this King? You can't explain Him fully; you don't have all the T's crossed and the I's dotted; because He's the King who rides a donkey. But there's enough faith, because it's not size that matters after all, there's enough substance to your faith, that you know Jesus is King. You're a disciple, you're a follower of Jesus, through and through, come what may. Friends, which are you?

I suspect that many of us might have had experiences with a number of these groups. I don't think I've ever been amongst the religious and political leaders, certainly not as far as God is concerned, though maybe a little with Jesus Himself. Because, after all, I didn't really understand anything about Jesus for a long time...

I knew His name, but not anything of Him, I had no real understanding of the significance of Easter, for example, and so I didn't doubt God, but this Jesus guy didn't figure in my understanding of the world.

And then, one day, He did. Because one day, I came to see my need of Jesus. I'd messed up. I came face to face with my own brokenness, my own humanity, and I found in Jesus scandalous grace, a mercy wide and free, which I knew I now needed, and it changed my life forever.

But along the way, I've had my wobbles. There have been those moments when Jesus has just not matched up to my earlier expectations. And there have been those times when I've come to the point of asking: what do I really believe of Jesus? What do I really even know, of Jesus?

Back in mid-March, I was speaking at the Breathing In event at Brightons Church, and we were speaking a little about Christian apologetics, about the defence of the faith. I recalled for the folks there a time when I really questioned what I knew of Jesus, and all I was sure of was this: I knew I could trust the Bible, so I knew Jesus lived, that He died, that He rose again, so He was who He claimed to be, and I knew by putting faith in Him, I was a child of God. I think that's about all I was sure of, but it got me through, and in time, faith was restored, relationship rebuilt, pain healed but with scars that were there below the surface.

So now, today, I would say I'm quite firmly in the disciple group. I'm not saying I don't question or doubt. But I've come to a place where I can live with mystery, with the

unknown and unanswered. I know Jesus to be King. I know Him to love me and love this world. After all, this week of all weeks, is the one which proves these things.

Friends, what's your response to Jesus? Does He feature in your picture of the world? Is He more, than simply, your "genie in a bottle"? Have you come to know Jesus as King of all creation, but the King who comes riding on a donkey? Is He to you the King of kings, even though He does stuff, or things happen, which just don't make sense?

Friends, I hope we can all reach that place, but even if we can, faith is not easy. **There are still questions, there are still unknowns, there is still mystery. And there will be those times, still, where the best, maybe the only,**

response is to weep, to wail, to lament. But as we saw on Sunday, we're in good company, for in v41, we read, 'As [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it...'

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and He weeps because it was the place of deepest rebellion against God, its people are blind to the One in whom true peace lies and in whom fullness of life could be found. For they have and will set their own interests and agenda before those of God, they will resort to murder to do so. Jesus can see where Israel is heading, and He knows that their infidelity to God and obstinacy towards His reign will only lead to ruin.

But, as you hear those words of judgment and see His actions of rebuke in the temple, as you see both prophet

and priest in Jesus, speaking truth to power one moment then cleansing what is defiled the next, remember His tears, remember His tears of lament. What He says, what He does, issues forth not from a stern and cold justice, but from a heart of love, a heart that wants the best for, and from, His people, and so now must oppose their rebellion, even though it breaks His heart.

It's the mystery of the gospel friends: that God is love, but His love will not overlook, cannot overlook, evil, and so there will be judgment of sin. But it breaks the heart of God. God was grieved to His heart, Genesis declares, over the violent wickedness of His human creatures. He was devastated when His own people, described as His bride, turned away from His love to give their love to another.

Some Christians like to think of God as above all that, knowing everything, in charge of everything, calm and unaffected by the troubles in His world. But that's not the picture we get in the Bible, and lament is not just an outlet for frail, little humanity. Here is King Jesus, full of power and authority, yet vulnerable, honest and caring enough that He cries, He laments.

Lament is the cry of a heart that is shattered, raw, gazing into suffering, bruised by its ragged edges and crying out for justice. Lament resists shallow, packaged, simplistic answers. It demands fierce authenticity and is unafraid of unanswerable questions. Lament is not the antithesis of faith; it is what faith looks like when it draws near to grief. The more passionately we believe in the goodness of

God, the more passionately we protest when His goodness is obscured, and so we lament.

Friends, we don't have to have all the answers, ever, and not even in or for our present time. Yet not having the answers, doesn't mean we must give up on Jesus being King of kings or truly caring for the nations. For He welcomes us to cry with those who cry, and mourn with those who mourn, and in the midst of pain and brokenness, find the God who laments with us and for us.

May this be the Jesus we know and whom we follow, not only this week, but until we see Him face to face.

May it be so. Amen.