

Palm Sunday**The Lord has need**

Psalm 118:19-24; Luke 19:28-40

"The road to Jerusalem is the scandal of Palm Sunday. We can follow Jesus in His pathway from Bethany, across the ridge and down the Mount of Olives, past the Garden of Gethsemane, across the Kidron Valley, and finally up to Jerusalem. As Jesus reaches the last week of His ministry on earth, He knows the significance of what is happening on the road to Jerusalem. It will lead to the cleansing of the Temple, the Last Supper, the Mount of Olives, the cross, and the tomb - a week of chaos and confusion but also of resurrection and redemption."ⁱ

In a week that has seen chaos and confusion across our world on the stock markets - is there yet any sign of resurrection and redemption I wonder? The eyes and minds of the world have been distracted from Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, Sudan and South Sudan, Central Africa and other war-blighted nations. We have been distracted by money and finance, which we understand because it affects us, from a peace we cannot deliver or fund, because the political will does not, as of yet, appear to be there.

It is more than ironic that in Luke's telling of the story of Jesus we have angels singing "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased*", at the nativity of Jesus; Here as He approaches His death, the inconstant crowds outside the walls of Jerusalem sing out, "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" At His birth the multitude of angels. As He approached His death a multitude of a crowd. Jesus rides in on a donkey, the sign of the Messiah, the advent of peace in Jerusalem. The meaning of 'Jerusalem' is 'City of Peace.' Peace in heaven, the crowds cried out; and in a few days they cried out for the death of peace as they sought to crucify their Saviour. This is the moment that the

Healer, Preacher, Teacher, Messiah dares to enter Jerusalem, the centre of Judaism. The home of the Temple, the capital city, and the point of cultural identity.

In Jewish tradition found in the Old Testament prophet Zechariah, the Messiah, God's anointed, the Saviour of Israel, the Redeemer of the world, will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. Jesus fulfils the prophecy. *"Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass."*ⁱ

The event had been stage-managed. We have no details other than the secret code to be used to secure the donkey. *"The Lord has need of it."* In Jewish ritual animals that had not been used for any other purpose were used for significant rituals in religious tradition. The colt, *"on which no one had yet sat..."*

From the east comes Jesus' procession. Dressed in ordinary clothing, riding on a young donkey. No palm branches in Luke's account; not even a 'hosanna'! But crowds, and cloaks in a kind of red-carpet pathway into the city. *'Blessed is the King Who comes in the name of the Lord'* they sang from Psalm 118.

From the west, from the Roman coastal stronghold of Caesarea, is another procession on that Passover Week. Pilate draped in the glittering glory of Roman imperial power: horses, chariots and gleaming armour. The Governor is moving with the Roman army into Jerusalem and the Antonia Fortress, built by Herod the Great (the Herod at Jesus' birth) to protect the Temple. Pilate aiming to make sure, as the Romans did at every Passover when the population of Jerusalem mushroomed by thousands, to make sure nothing got out of hand. *"Insurrection was in the air with the memory of God's deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt"*ⁱⁱⁱ in the time of Moses.

The Pharisees, perhaps watching from the roadside, perhaps watching from the city walls, became more anxious. Were they unhappy with the implication that Jesus was the Messiah? Were they,

from their vantage point, also aware of Pilate's procession entering from the other side of the city, and the febrile tension in the city, and fearing the Empire would strike back?

In the midst of it all - Jesus. And hanging in the air that statement, 'The Lord has need'.

What does the Lord have need of today? Have His needs changed from that first Palm Sunday, as He rode into Jerusalem before the Passover, before all the other events of what we now call Holy Week? He heard the crowds, He saw the excited faces of His followers, His disciples, reading their minds as they walked proudly beside Him. Here was their man, coming to sort out the Romans. Coming to sort out the tired religion of the chief priests and pharisees. Coming to sort out the mess that the world was in. Coming to show people, tell people, about the God of the world Who loved them all and would make everything different and better in an instant. Coming to heal the sick. Coming to clothe the naked. Coming to feed the hungry. Coming to liberate the imprisoned. Coming to give strength to the weary. Coming to bring peace where nations were torn by military and economic turmoil. Coming to save the world! Even if the people had been silenced, the very stones would shout out that God's Messiah, God's chosen One had come to save the world.

But it began with the words, 'The Lord has need...' A borrowed donkey, and a humble heart, and maybe bowed head and shoulders. The Lord knew what was needed: repentance; mercy; forgiveness; humility; generosity; grace; peace; faith; hope; love. Is that what He had need of that first Palm Sunday, as He rode into Jerusalem? Is that what He found?

The Lord has need. Riding into our world today, over the literal rubble of Gaza and Kyiv, Khartoum and Juba; over the economic rubble of a week of tariffs activated and paused; over the worrying concerns about pensions and jobs and how people are going to live. Riding over the misrepresentation of the Christian political right in any country where it exists that fails to put love of neighbour as self, first, and kindness to widows and orphans and refugees, and inclusion of the

dispossessed and the homeless and the violated. We will never have peace on earth until we can quiet the wars and selfishness within our own hearts.

The Lord has need. Lest we think this is something that only affects the high and mighty and meta narratives of politics and economics, He rides through the lives of churches and local communities and individuals. The Lord has need for churches to be honest about the current state of affairs we all face as the world in which we operate has changed, and we must change too as we engage with new opportunities and challenges and not bury ourselves in attitudes that served well decades ago but no longer. Where churches need to recognise that there is more that we can do together and be together than there is for us on our own. Where communities that overlook the isolated and vulnerable living on their doorsteps and along their streets need to remember the renaissance of kindness that it took a lockdown for us to realize and do something about. Something which has now, very considerably, vanished from where we live as we become enwrapped in ourselves and our immediate circle of family or friends. Do we now see through or pass by those people who no longer feature amongst our concerns despite their never having gone away?

The Lord has need. He rides, humbly on His donkey, around our lives and homes. What is it that you think the Lord might require of you? What wonderful, unique gifts and talents and time and capabilities do you have that you do not yet fully deploy for the benefit of others? Many here will and do, but as Lent draws to a close, what good causes, better behaviours, kinder practices do you still have time to take up, and persevere with, before the revealing light of Easter falls upon you?

"Jesus rides no high horse, just a lowly (donkey). He chooses to enter a deadly situation without force or protection. He gives Himself freely without reservation."^{iv} The Lord has need.

Halfway down the Mount of Olives there is a small chapel in the shape of a teardrop. It is called Dominus Flevit, Latin for 'the Lord weeps'. It is said to be the spot where Jesus paused, on His donkey, and wept over broken Jerusalem and the broken world. I sometimes wonder if it had been better named, Dominus Indiget, The Lord has need; and surrounded by a donkey sanctuary. Our weeping Jesus, on His donkey, looking towards us still and saying to any who will listen: "Help Me, I need you."

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ Insook Lee, *Feasting on the Gospels, Luke Vol 2*, p176

ⁱⁱ Zechariah 9:9

ⁱⁱⁱ H Stephen Shoemaker, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 2* p153

^{iv} William Carter, *ibid*, p156