

Palm Sunday, Church Camp, Tirohanga

Ed Masters
28 March 2010

Let me open with prayer –

Lord Jesus, Giver of Life,

We are gathered here to celebrate the life you have given us and the community you have formed. We give you thanks for your grace and ask that you draw us closer to you each moment of every day.

We pray in the name of Christ

Amen

G'day, I think most of you know me by now, but if not, my name is Ed, and I've been leading the youth groups this year. I've been enjoying the journey so far, and the youth are constantly teaching me new things and keeping me on my toes. We have been reading the book of Mark, trying to get an idea of the shape of Jesus' ministry and life, and see where he walked. And now, at the end of the term we are approaching the high point in the story.

We just had the story of Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem read to us. It is one of the triumphant stories of Jesus life, where he is welcomed with open arms into Jerusalem as the king. I always imagine this awesome scene where the streets are lined with people, waving palm branches and the air crackling with excitement. More recently though I realised what comes next in the story... within a week or so His disciples have abandoned him and the same crowds are shouting for him to be crucified! So what I want to do this morning is explore why the people were so excited to welcome Jesus and then changed their minds, have a look at the sort of King Jesus is, and then discuss why this is even relevant for us today.

But before we do this, Can I ask you all a bit of a favour. Children, if you go outside there is a pile of branches at the bottom of the stairs, can you grab one and bring them in and put them down the aisle here...

In this passage, Jesus has been journeying to Jerusalem and on the way he stops, and someone brings word that his friend Lazarus is sick and dying. Jesus says, yep, don't worry, it'll be all good. Then Lazarus dies, and four days after he dies Jesus finally arrives, and then simply raises Lazarus from the dead.

Then Jesus heads off to Jerusalem for Passover. At Passover time Jerusalem is chock-a-block. Jews from all over the Mediterranean gather back there to celebrate God actions which liberated Israel from slavery in Egypt. It is the most significant celebration on the Jewish calendar. The reason they bothered to celebrate it every year was to remind themselves of the gracious actions of God, and keep the promises of God present and real i their lives. Yet as they gathered for Passover, the Jews were fully aware that Israel was not free, Israel was being ruled by yet another powerful nation – Rome. Now one of the promises that God had made to Israel was that there would be a figure who would liberate them and set them free. The Jews thought this would be a kingly figure who would overthrow Rome and set Israel up at the centre of the world. So, the people catch the news of Jesus, they would have heard about Lazarus, about the other miracles he has done and all the epic things he said about himself – and they thought, yep, this is it, the King is here!!

The first Christians, Jesus' disciples, did not understand what was going on, and the crowds obviously had a pretty thin understanding on it as well cos they changed their minds in the blink of an eye! As we look back we can reflect that the people were right to welcome Jesus as their king, but they didn't know what that meant. They thought he was going to set the free from Rome, and when it didn't turn out that way they abandoned him. John's Gospel tells us that the disciples did not understand until after Jesus was glorified. This means that the

disciples had to watch Jesus go all the way to the cross without understanding, and only afterwards did they get it. Picture them sitting around the table with Jesus for the Last Supper. To us, it is a massive indication of what is coming next cos we know our story, but for them it must have been baffling. They sit down to celebrate that central thing in their history, the central religious thing, and suddenly Jesus starts to redefine the whole thing around himself – hey, this bread, it's my body. This wine, it's my blood, gather around my broken body and be saved... The disciples must have been confused in a chronic way!

So here we are today. It is Palm Sunday, the day we as Christians remember Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem and His journey to the cross. But just as the disciples came to understand through Jesus' journey to the cross and His resurrection, it is the same for us. Jesus cannot be understood in isolation from that cross, it is the way we can grasp the sort of King that Jesus is. So what I want to invite us to do is to immerse ourselves in the story. Over the next week take a bit of time each day and read part of Jesus' final week. Read about the crucifixion on Thursday or Friday. As you read, let yourself sink into the story. Get lost in it, and let Jesus find you there as he journeys to the cross.

Now, for us today, what does it mean? We are here as followers of Jesus. The people of Jerusalem laid branches for Jesus, and the young people of our church community have done the same. And now they bring the body and blood of our Lord. I want to invite you to share in the sacrifice of Christ, to partake in His body and His blood which was spilt for our redemption and the redemption of the world. This is the sort of King that we have - a King who gives His life for His people! Today, we will re-enact part of the story of Christ's week before his crucifixion and I invite you all to journey through Holy Week by reading one of those passion narratives.