

Palm Sunday

I've been imagining what it was like, that day of the hero's welcome in Jerusalem. Was it something like a carnival parade? That combination of street parties and floats where the atmosphere is filled with song, music, dance and of course happy people.

When my daughter was young, we went to 'Disney World' and participated in: A colourful, magical parade that was an amazing spectacular.

The parade route was lined with adults as well as children shouting and singing and soon the young at heart gathered from far and wide, followed their dreams to the place where if you believe the enthusiasm "dreams come true".

Jerusalem must also have been full of noise and buzz. **Their** dreams were going to come true. The crowd had heard about Jesus's miracles they thought of him as the Leader, a Messiah capable of delivering them from the occupation of the Roman Empire.

An exciting atmosphere was bound to flourish over such a crowd of people with the old, the middle aged and the young jamming the streets.

It was Passover the special time of celebrations. The greatest of all the Jewish feasts, when people from all over Israel made their pilgrimage to celebrate God freeing them from Egyptian slavery.

To say there was a great crowd **would be an under-statement**. It's been estimated that over two million people were involved in the great Passover Feast and 256,000 lambs were killed, even for me with quite an imagination it's hard to visualise the scene.

The old city of Jerusalem is today surrounded by a wall which contains 8 gates.....Gates in walls are always important as they are places of entry and exit. In biblical Israel, though, gates weren't just a doorway into the city. They were where prophets cried out and

Kings judged. When Jesus approached the city gates, he probably entered through one of the gates at the Eastern wall nearest to the Mount of Olives. He would have heard the resounding song of Psalm 118. Ringing loud in his ears as the crowd call out in honour of their long-awaited Messiah.

"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." (*Psalm 118:25-26*).

The word Hosanna meant "save us" but it is also a shout of praise as well, 'Hosanna' recognises two things: a need for help and that Jesus is the one who can meet it.

The anticipation must have filled the air, all those celebrating people spreading their cloaks and small branches of trees throughout the streets before Jesus. The cloaks and branches were like today's red carpet and indicated, that, the person coming is an arriving King or VIP approaching in triumph.

But Jesus arrives on a donkey versus the arrival on a horse, the animal of war. This may refer to the tradition that He was arriving in peace, on an animal of peace, with peaceful intentions.

Most importantly these events fulfil the prophecy of Zachariah (9:9) when he said:

**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey.**

This was all particularly disturbing to the religious leaders. They demanded that Jesus silence the crowd, but he responded that even

if the crowd were silent, the stones would cry out. Jesus was making the point, if we do not worship the creator, creation itself will take it over.

An Eye Witness Account.....

It was an exciting week in Jerusalem. Rumors had been circulating for days that Jesus was coming to our city. We heard many things about Jesus of Nazareth. – About his miracles, about his teachings, and about his love for people. Many people believed that he was a prophet, and some even believed that he was the promised Messiah. I didn't know what to think about Jesus. But I was excited to hear he would soon arrive in Jerusalem.

Like many others I was curious to see this man that all of Israel was talking about. I vividly remember the day that Jesus came to town. It was the Sunday before Passover. I was working in my shop when I began to hear all kinds of commotion. Hundreds of people began flocking to the streets. They began to shout, "Jesus is Coming" "Jesus is coming". "Make way, make way, Jesus is coming". People began to break palm branches from trees and throw them onto the road as Jesus passed by. A few moments later I saw Jesus' riding on a donkey.

Electricity was in the air. People were shouting and singing. The children got especially excited about Jesus' arrival. Up and down the street I saw people waving and crying out "Hosanna, Hosanna." Finally, Jesus passed right by my shop. I only got a quick glance at him. But he looked right at me and he smiled.

I'll never forget that week in Jerusalem. Everywhere I went people were talking about Jesus. But each day the mood was changing.

Instead of praising Jesus, people began to criticize him. I don't know the details, but Jesus got into some kind of trouble with the authorities and they put him on trial.

Finally, on Friday, Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd. He offered to release Jesus, but the people wanted him killed. I couldn't understand it. Just five days earlier, people were shouting, "Hosanna" to Jesus, but the **same people** were shouting "crucify him" "crucify him" And that's just what they did. They executed him on a cross.

Where do we see ourselves in the story, it's easy to judge characters from a distance? Are we really so different? How does our faith weaken when God does not deliver what we are expecting?

How is our faith tested when the support of others and our assumptions fall away?

Are we, sometimes swayed by the crowd's approval, and do we avoid conflict for fear of its cost to us?

The events of the next week would forever change the world.

They had all expected Jesus to be an earthly king, a military king but God had given them something, so much better, a heavenly king, a messianic kingan open gate into heaven.

Our palm crosses remind us the palm-covered path still leads to Him on **our** journey, **our** entry, into the Holy Week ahead, to an empty tomb, via a cross.

On Thursday there is: The Last Supper and Betrayal.

Friday sees Jesus's arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

Saturday is a vigil of waiting.

AND then on **Sunday** Jesus rises from the grave.

Today we shout from the roof tops, sing at the top of our voices. You are our Lord, we are your people – Hosanna, Hosanna.

Let us: Make way for Christ the King.

He may look right at you, and smile.