

# Sermon

Sunday 5 April 2020

Matt 21 1-11

The Triumphal Entry

## Looking forward to

I wonder what you are looking forward to at the moment.

What will you do when the current Covid-19 restrictions are lifted? Where will you go? Who will you see?

It's difficult to set our own expectations. We have to hope we'll all be allowed out soon.

I remember a rather depressing piece of graffiti which read:

*Owing to current financial stringencies, the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off until further notice.*

## Crowd

One thing which will feel strange will be being in a crowd.

The last one I was in was four weeks ago when I squeezed into the last space on a Northern Line Train from Kings Cross to Angel. I don't miss that sort of crowd but it would be fun to be back in a small crowd.

Today's reading from Matthew feels rather alien. A large crowd gathering in Jerusalem.

## Theatre

Jesus assesses the situation perfectly and opts for a donkey as his mode of transport.

Perhaps one of his disciples said, “it’s not what the people will expect” And maybe Jesus replied, “exactly”.

There is definitely some theatre being played out here.

Some of it by Jesus – maybe some of it by Matthew in his account.

## Donkey

Jesus enters the city. Is he saying that he is not really a king? Or is he saying he is a king but the sort of king who rides a donkey, not a war-horse.

Some of the crowd will get the reference to the entrance of a humble king. Zechariah 9 v9. Matthew quotes it.

## David

Others believe Jesus to be a King in the line of David.

## Cloak Spreaders.

Another group know about Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, the fourth king of the kingdom, of Judah mentioned in 2 Kings 9 v 13.

When he was anointed king his officers quickly took off their cloaks and spread them on the ground in front of him

as a sign of loyalty. A cloak was often the most costly and essential possession.

And they blow trumpets. We're not told the crowd greeting Jesus had trumpets.

## Palm Cutters

Others cut down palm branches. These people remembered the story of 200 years earlier at the time of King Judas Maccabeus (Apocrypha: 1 Maccabees 13.51) A triumphant king is met by a palm waving crowd.

All of this is about victory. Psalm 118 uses just the same language. This was the open top bus of the cup-winning team.

Of course, if Jesus rode into Fetcham now, we'd all step outside, stand 2m apart, and clap. Lock-down is not a good time for triumphal entries.

Matthew's message is clear: Everyone had a different view of what sort of king Jesus was. But he was a King, of that there was no doubt.

## Crowd

That was the crowd. People of the city. Pilgrims from Galilee. Followers. Disciples.

There were others. City dignitaries, the religious leaders, the Roman occupiers, officials from the King's palace.

They too had views of who this king was and what he might do.

## The Cast

But what a cast: Friends, Roman's, countryfolk, town-folk, scholars of Zechariah, fans of Davidic Kings, cloak spreaders, palm wavers, heads of the city, heads of state and leaders of the church.

It's is the entire cast of Matthew's Gospel. A crowd of thousands with very different ideas about this triumphant king.

## It all goes wrong

It seems unstoppable. But we know there will be a crucifixion ,not a coronation.

There will be no royal reign – but instead a glorious resurrection.

## Not the Point.

Matthew is not making the point that a good man and a great leader is about to be crucified and robbed of his opportunity to lead.

His point is that this great diverse crowd –officials, scholars donkey appreciators, cloak wavers, palm spreaders and trumpet blowers - have all got it wrong.

They are about to find out that this Messiah is not the sort of King people were expecting.

## Tom Wright

Tom Wright's says this in his commentary:

*People turn to God notoriously when there is something they want badly. Church attendance goes up in leaps and bounds when a major crisis strikes. Suddenly everybody wants to ask the big hard questions. Suddenly everybody wants Jesus to ride into the city and be the sort of king they want him to be.*

## Not the Easter we Expected

This morning we are joined by Christians across the globe, praying for this epidemic in which there is terrible suffering and loss. As well as a medical and humanitarian crisis, there will be huge economic and societal impacts.

If we are suffering in Surrey, what will it be like for those in Africa, India and South America?

God has the salvation of his people in mind – he cares less about restoring the world to the way it used to be – and even less about restoring to being just the way we like it.

End

Tom Wright notes, once we invite Jesus to help, he might be more thorough than we imagined. If you invite an accountant to help with your tax return, she may go through other areas of your financial affairs you did not expect.

### Not the Easter we Expected

Our church building is lying empty now and will be empty next Sunday. Not the Holy Week we would have expected. Not the Easter day we would have wanted.

Perhaps these empty churches can be made to illustrate a point – can become a symbol of something fundamental to of our faith.

Expectations are dangerous things. Jesus is not the king we desperately want him to be to suit the current circumstances. He is much more. He is the resurrected Son of God. His message is one of salvation, not that normal service will be resumed as soon as possible.

Amen.