

(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 12 Sunday 25th March_2018.

Palm Sunday: struggle and joy. READ John 12: 12 - 19

Our AIM for this year is for each of us individually and all of us together to explore what it means to be truly human. The Biblical argument is that humans are made in the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 1: 26, 27*) – not a physical likeness because God is Spirit. In Jesus we see the one truly human being: fully God fully human – because in every other human the image or likeness of God is spoilt, is imperfect because of our **Fall**.

Also, the clear teaching of both OT and NT is that the Messiah – the Anointed One has come and put to rights, make possible not just the gift of Resurrection Immortality but also a reconciliation and peacemaking in all damaged relationships.

Jesus looked for the JOY ahead of the struggle against the powers and evil. By obedience to the Father and the Godhead's plan Jesus accomplished the release of humans to freedom and the restoration of the Fallen.

(PP2) Why do crowds gather?

Crowd: a large group of people who gather as a temporary assembly. Sometimes "crowd" describes a mob. A crowd may have a common purpose or set of emotions – like the amazingly large crowds that gathered almost without explanation after the death of Princess Diana (1997). *Crowd psychology or mob psychology* has been much studied. *Berlonghi* (1995) classified them and their purpose as spectator, demonstrator or even escaping (e.g. migrants). Others have used different categories for example *Momboisse* (1967) who spoke of 4 categories: casual, conventional, expressive and aggressive. Crowds have different functions and different behaviours or moralities. As we know from football crowds there can be polar extremes - a real sense of community or a loss of individual responsibility as the psychology of the mob takes over.

In the case of the crowd following Jesus we read of the fears of the Pharisees who recognized Jesus' growing popularity and said *the whole world (everyone in our world) is following him*. The bigger the crowd the bigger the threat. They thought that their influence and power to control the masses was being weakened. They may never have been really popular, but they were certainly feared and generally obeyed.

Jesus' following was a threat to their influence and control. They needed to divide the crowd but on the Passover parade they dare not intervene because the crowd could turn against them. True this crowd (whatever its size) was mainly the ordinary, common people – the "hoi polloi" but there were also people of influence showing an interest in Jesus and his message.

(PP3) Why the crowd in Jerusalem? There was a crowd within a crowd.

- Passover Festival – traditionally one of the 3 holidays on which Jews make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the time of Jesus. They came to take part in the Festival of Pesach and especially as this focused around the magnificent Temple.

They celebrated God's deliverance both from the captivity of Egypt but also God's deliverance from death – as the angel of death in Egypt passed over them and their families because of the blood marked on the door post. The Hebrews were redeemed and escaped even through the splitting/ parting of the waters of the Red Sea. The Passover crowds from different parts of the world in Jerusalem would have temporarily swelled the population by thousands but the crowd coming out to meet Jesus was just a smaller crowd within a larger crowd. *D.E. Nineham* thinks the ovation from those welcoming Jesus may have hardly been noticed because of the bigger crowd. It may have been hundreds, but it doesn't seem to have attracted Roman Imperial concern – it was the Jewish Leaders who were jealous of the turn out and fearful of the following of Jesus.

- A message had come from those who witnessed the raising of Lazarus that Jesus was on the way. (*John 11 records the raising of Lazarus – v45 – v47! Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief Priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin*).

Palm Sunday is a celebration of Jesus' so called Triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

We've heard 2 independent accounts today of what happened – that of Matthew and that of John. This was a week prior to the Crucifixion and by that time the Pharisees and others had turned the majority of the crowd against Jesus. What did they use? Well as well as false witnesses they probably used fear and a mixture of threat and promises but we can really only guess knowing how political powers work even today.

(PP4) Even the close disciples of Jesus did not fully understand the action of Jesus on the day. He staged the sedate and humble parade into Jerusalem seated upon a donkey. And the crowd were jubilant and in celebration stripped the branches from the palms and waved them and with their cloaks threw them on the road in front of Jesus. Shouting out "Hosannah to David's Son" they both saw the potential of Jesus as a human deliverer but also cried to God – *Save the people now*. (It was on reflection that the Disciples understood the full significance of Jesus' choice and means of transport at this time when Jerusalem was packed. He was fulfilling the longing and prophecy of the Psalmist for God's Salvation (*Psalm 118: 25 - 27*) and the declaration of the **Prophet Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the fowl of a donkey.**

In this one statement from Zechariah we see so much that is of **the new thing that Jesus is doing**. It is the daughters of Zion that are ascribed to sing and rejoice this great day and it is the very new, very young unridden colt that carries Jesus – the bringer of everything new. (The daughters of Zion were the first witnesses to the resurrection and this was the virgin or maiden journey of the colt.) It is this new thing that most of the Pharisees and Sadducees of the Sanhedrin feared. They feared the Romans power to remove them as a nation (John 11: 47,48)

In this second half of John's account we see the growing fear and plot of the Sanhedrin in part to silence and remove Jesus from the face of the earth. To do this they must to some extent frighten the bulk of the crowd following Jesus into silence and incite a small

Becoming human- giving glory_2018. 25 March 2018.

but significant section of the bigger crowd to call for Jesus' execution. To do this they began in earnest to plot in secret. These days leading up to the Passover were of great significance in this turning of the crowd.

One of the lessons for us to learn is surely that crowds can be turned by just a few, and fear can be used to silence the mouths of believers. In the long run even, his close friends were turned for a season. I'm not sure about you but I am not sure how willing I would have been to turn out for Jesus and stand by his side to be counted if my life was at stake. **But Jesus was not turned** – *he resolutely set his face to Jerusalem (Luke 9: 51). For the joy set before hi he endured the Cross, scorning its shame... (Hebrews 12: 2)*

(The rest of this week outlined).