

Revd. Simon Lewis

Isolation Radio Talk

Sunday 28 March
Theme: Palm Sunday

Love, and the shadow of the cross

Good Morning

Today is about the week ahead. I sketch an outline of what happened as the Gospel writers tell it; if you are serious about your Christian faith, I will try to help you understand what happened. I will speak about opportunities you are given in a sceptical and unbelieving generation.

Demonstrations are familiar to us all; the news reports, the phone footage streamed, you may have been on one. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowds come out to see him. It's a lively affair, much shouting, singing, noise; and already an edge of ugliness; it was not dignified. The authorities clearly saw sinister elements were at work. Politically, religiously, personally; it was dangerous.

Watch as the figure of Jesus begins what we call Holy Week. The journey began a week ago. From the economic heartland of Galilee in the north he set out against the advice and wishes of his disciples. He makes his way to Jerusalem, arriving finally in Bethany - perhaps 3 miles from Jerusalem – staying at the house of Mary and Martha, his friends.

He makes his way from Bethany, on what we call Palm Sunday; he comes in sight of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. There is quite a steep drop into the valley; Jesus is standing on top of the 'Mount of Olives'. Nestling at the bottom is the Garden of Gethsemane; it has a critical part to play later in the drama of the week.

The road from Bethany to Jerusalem proves a long road. It has extended to every part of the World and into every generation. The 'King' rides' on a donkey; he is greeted with the same mixture of joy, scepticism, disbelief, scorn, and indeed anger, as he is today. The city is in turmoil; as the world today is in turmoil; and the question is still asked – 'who is this?'

Into the temple he goes; in anger he overturns the tables of the traders. Imagine the scene; the public disorder, the confrontation, a crucifixion; yes, it ends on the Cross. For the rest of Sunday as on Monday and Tuesday Jesus comes to Jerusalem each day from Bethany; the Gospels tell of the intensity of his conversation; the rising tide of opposition.

Jesus stays out in Bethany on Wednesday; in the evening they have dinner in the house of Simon. It is there Mary of Magdala (we suppose it is) anoints his feet with costly perfume; then, and because of that tender act, Judas determines to betray him.

So to Thursday evening when, by secret arrangement, Jesus eats his last meal with his disciples and passes to them the blueprint for worship that bewildered his disciples then, but enriched straight away after Easter. That Last Supper feeds you today; Jesus took bread and broke it; took wine and blessed it; he gave it to them; 'this is *my* body; this is *my* blood'.

In the Garden of Gethsemane he is arrested; through the night he is tried and condemned; at last, on Friday, 'Good' Friday, his life pours out on the cross. Later he is taken from the cross and laid in a borrowed tomb. You might suppose that is where the story should end. Not so; though today, I pause.

I try to paint a living, moving picture; I want to give power to your religious imagination. I give you Holy Week as a whole experience; I invite you to join in a pilgrimage which is both intensely personal but belongs to all time and to the whole Church; to all the World.

I go on to say that if your Easter Faith is to be true, really true, it will have, as part of it, the wounds of Calvary. The world of today still bleeds with those wounds. The cross is never left behind, never far away, never forgotten. It is the cross that stands; a signpost to the World. An Easter Faith always includes the cross.

You may want to debate what actually happened from Palm Sunday to Easter Day. The truth is that what happened cannot with real certainty be recalled. What it *means* can. The Gospel writers tell of the Passion as one unbroken narrative not because of its awfulness and horror but because it is a story of how evil does its very worst. Death wins the battle but God triumphs. In darkness, despair and loss, God cries 'Glory'. That glory is pure Love, it is glory of *eternal dimensions*, it carries with it the shadow of the cross, always the cross. For here is no easy way.

I want you, to make the journey of Holy Week. You do it for two reasons, first, for your own souls sake; then for the sake of others.

Try to keep a good Holy Week through the discipline of prayer; or in reading and study of the Scriptures. Your Church offers a way in the ordered round of Holy Week worship. It does not help to bounce straight from the excitement of Palm Sunday to the joy of Easter Day, certainly the week must include Maundy Thursday or Good Friday. 'Mandatum est' or 'New-Commandment-Thursday' is the way for your soul to touch the divine; On Good Friday, God Godself, lives out the ultimate experience of this World that reaches each of us. Freedom, yes your freedom to choose to love God or not, allows the possibility of turning away from God and God's command to love; you may lose God, but now, no longer are you judged from above: God knows you from within; God knows the abyss of suffering and hell.

Beside your own personal journey you may bear public witness to your faith. One of the most hurtful criticisms of Christians is the mismatch between what they say and what they do. There are many that sit in viscous judgement on the Christian faith. Their way is often to point at those who claim Christ as their Saviour. Let Holy Week strengthen the resolve of *your* inner mind to make space, *sacred space*, for God to speak to your soul. 'Could you not watch with me one hour?' says Jesus to his sleeping disciples. You can hear the echo still. Can you not walk with him through this Holy Week?

Here in the presence of the Passion, Crucifixion and death of Jesus, you are in the presence of the Divine.

Thank you for listening