

Jesus on the Donkey

Matthew 21:1-18

**** Allenby walking into Jerusalem ****

I love the theatre of this, the show, the parade,
Because from Jesus it is so unusual.

Up until this point he has been trying to keep things quiet
He heals someone - don't tell anyone that you've been healed
The demons cry out - we know who you are - he orders them silent
The disciples realise he is the Messiah - do not tell anyone this

But now,
He says to the disciples
He want a donkey
I want a donkey and a colt in Matthew
And the theatre of this
Go and untie one that's never been ridden,
And just take it
Untie it,
And if anyone asks - just say "The Master needs it"

This is Jesus at his most miracle making
He never normally does this.
He doesn't pull rank unless he has to
But this time he does
He's not holding back any more
Because he's going to Jerusalem,
And this needs to be done right.. with all the show, with the parade, with the prophecies
coming to fruition.

Why now for the parade?

Well it's not showing off, if that's who you really are...
He wants to be seen,
He wants people to know.

But he wants people to know that there is something about this Messiah. Messiah means King.

He wants people to see him as King.

This is harking back to a group of Kings who had lived almost 200 years before
The first was a man called Judas Maccabeus, who did what no-one had done for centuries, he had been a Jewish king who had won battles
And when he had won his great battle against the wicked Syrian and Greek King Antochius
He entered Jerusalem, and the people waved palm branches in celebration.

And this was in the memory of the people, that is why Judas was such a big name in Jesus' time, it was a King's name.

12 years after Judas Maccabeus, his brother Simon Maccabeus - can you see those names
These are names of the disciples... Simon Maccabeus wins a battle against the Greeks, the Greeks, the great king Trypho the magnificent,
And in 154BC he enters Jerusalem,
And people wave palm branches.

So when Jesus orders this, plans this, he knows,
He knows what the people are thinking...
This is the King, and he wants them to think this
This is a King's parade, the arrival of the King anointed by God.

And normally King's go on parades after they have won the battle
But he goes before,
Because he is so sure of the result, because he knows that the battle will be won?

And ... there is a big difference...

In Buckingham palace throne room at the moment,
The whole room has been set out as a rehearsal space for the great Coronation
All the symbols are being thought about - William has vetoed the Consort's Ivor sceptre

Chairs and tables are being used as stand-ins for thrones and altars
In order to get King Charles used to the weight of the Crown

There is a bowler hat filled with flour

And why... because this day has to be right
May 6th, the Coronation has to be a day which symbolises the dignity
The symbolic power, the sense of simple royalty which is divinely blessed
On that day.

This matters.

Now imagine, if on the morning of the May 6th,
The crowds gathered, the gates of Buckingham Palace are opened,
And out into the Mall, people catch straining to catch a glimpse of the great king
They strain and strain, to see him, on his great day, the day he has been preparing for his
whole life,
And they stretch, and they glimpse him, bobbing,
For he is riding on a donkey.

That is what people see,
And they recognise that this is different
This is a different kind of King,
Who is going to win victory a different way.

And people don't seem to be upset by the donkey,
Because they know their Bibles,
And they know that Zechariah had prophesied that the King would arrive on the donkey,
and a colt,
In Matthew the connection with Zechariah is even stronger, because Zechariah seems to
suggest a donkey and a colt, and that is what Matthew describes, two animals.

So he is coming in with all expectation and all the hope
And all the sense of triumph of a king
But there is a difference because he is on a donkey, he is going to do things a different
way
He will win his battle in weakness and apparent failure
Something about this donkey points to cross.

I wonder as Jesus rode, as he saw the people recognising his kingship
As they sing Hosanna, Hosanna to the son of David,

I wonder if his mind went back to something that happened three years before, in the desert of the Jordan,
Where the devil had tempted him, he had said you can have all the kingdoms, you won't just be a king, you will be an emperor, you will be the king of kings, and you can have all of this if you bow to me. And he said "no"

Instead Jesus had arrived at this point, not through bowing to the Devil
But constantly in every moment, in obedience still to the Father.
The Son has stayed true to the Father, and that way he will be King.

And the crowds are wrestling with this...

What kind of King, on the donkey, what kind of battle, what kind of weapons, what kind of victory.

They do not realise that he is going to take on the biggest enemy of all,

Not just the Greeks whom Maccabeus defeated

Not just the Romans whom no-one has defeated

Something even bigger than the Greeks and the Romans

He is going to take on death

And he is going to take on sin

And he is going to take on all the powers and the principalities in all the dark places

With something even more humiliating than a donkey

On a cross.

He is a King who is going to win a victory,

And all of this is point to the moment, and he wants them to see it.

Their hope in him is not misplaced

Their songs are rightly sung

Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord

Hosanna in the highest heaven.

All of hope

All of history

All of prophesy

Is held in the king on the donkey.

This is why you get the conversation of the folks in Jerusalem saying

“Who is this?”

And the people from outside travelling with him saying

“This is Jesus the prophet, the one from Galilee, the one from Nazareth” the place you have never even heard of, the backwater, him.

The king from Auchtermuchty, the place from Applecross, from Scrabster, from Stranraer from Fionnphort, from Port Asking, from Newton Stewart, from Coldstream

That’s the shock of it.

And then he does the thing that everybody does who marches into Jerusalem

Judas Maccabeus did it, he went from the streets of the city, to the temple and tore down the altars, and purified the sanctuary

Simon Maccabeus did it cleansed the whole citadel and strengthened the fortifications of the temple hill

And King Charles will do it, he will walk through the streets and into the Abbey

And Jesus does it, he goes to the temple

Because the temple is everything,

The temple is the city

The temple is the nation

The temple is the universe

The whole temple, the middle of it, the holiest of holies, is of equal width and length and height, it is a cube, to represent the whole of the universe.

So the temple is the universe,

There is a picture of the temple in the psalms where it says

“All of it glorifies God”

Just as all of the universe is to glorify God.

And if the temple is corrupt

The god it points to is a false god.

And he goes there, because this place is a picture of the universe,

And somehow the spirituality, the worship of the temple radiates out to the whole world.

And there is corruption, so he cleanses out the money changers

Saying this was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of thieves

And there is illness and disease

And he heals many of illness and disease, because the temple is to be a place of healing

And the children sing, they sense it, they sing the song

Hosanna to the son of David

Because the temple is a place of worship

Which children get more than adults

And the adults are angry

And he says have you not read, the psalms - he knows they have read the psalms, but have they really read the psalms

"Out of the mouths of babes and infants,

You have ordained praise".

This is a victory parade, of a different of victory,

It is the victory over sin and the darkness of this world

It is the only victory which will not lead to more violence

It is a victory of the poison that threatens the human heart

It is a victory over the forces of false religion,

There is something deeply cosmic that is going to happen here in the very heart of God.

I think this is an invitation to walk with him this week,

To see what he does

And to worship him

I think this is a story of hope for the world

That he would move into every citadel, every palace, every temple

And cleanse the institutions of this world to work for peace and justice

I think this too is a story of how he enters every human community

To renew, and at the heart of this is the life of the holy place

Radiating out.

And I think too this is a story about the king who comes into the human heart
Do you not know that your own body is a temple of the Holy Spirit says Paul
And that you are not your own
Therefore you were bought with a price
And glorify God in your body.

This is the gospel
You were bought with a price
Glorify God with your Body
Which is the temple of the Holy Spirit

The King is coming
Hosanna
Hosanna
Hosanna to the Son of David
Hosanna

AMEN