



Palm Sunday
April 9th 2017
Revd Jenny Wilkens
Matthew 21:1-11, 26:14-27:66

http://www.stlukesinthecity.org.nz/sermons_pid_22.html

Last week our Gospel told the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, and of Jesus revealing himself to Martha as the one who can claim 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

At the climax of that story, we hear "Jesus *cried out with a loud voice*, Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43).

It's an unusual rare verb¹ that John uses for 'Jesus cried out'. It is the same verb that is used by the other three gospel writers but they use it at the crucifixion when they say that on the cross Jesus *cries out with a loud voice* (Mt 27:50) and then surrenders himself to death, giving up his spirit to God.

John has Jesus *criying out with a loud voice* at the tomb of Lazarus. What John is telling us here is that this is the moment when Jesus gives up his life so that Lazarus might live. For Jesus is well aware that to perform such a dramatic miracle as raising someone from the dead just a few miles from Jerusalem is to guarantee his own death. And indeed John tells us 'from that day on, the [religious authorities] planned to put Jesus to death' (John 11:53).

An act that would bring life and healing to Lazarus so quickly changed into being an act that brought death for Jesus at the hands of those who could not look such love and saving power in the face without trying to bring it down, to take away its challenge, to kill it.

So we begin today with first the euphoria, excitement and heightened expectations of the crowd who welcome Jesus to Jerusalem, the one they call a prophet, the one they at least glimpse may be the Messiah who will bring salvation, freedom, release from captivity to the Romans. But they only grasp half the story. Jesus' triumphal entry subverts the Roman triumphal parade of a conquering general riding a white charger. Rather Jesus comes 'humble and riding on a donkey' (Mt 21:5, Zechariah 9:9), in Matthew's gospel a donkey with a colt at hoof, weak and vulnerable.

¹ ἐκραυγασεν, ekraugasen, he cried out. Thanks to Bishop Kelvin Wright for this insight in his blog, Available Light vendr.blogspot.co.nz/2017/04/the-last-week.html

And the accompanying crowd is a rag-taggle procession, full of enthusiasm for this celebrity parade, but saying more than they know, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord". Matthew tells us that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, 'the whole city was in turmoil', the word for 'turmoil' is a word used of earthquakes, the whole city was shaking and quaking. We know all about that. Matthew will again speak of an earthquake at the very moment of Jesus' death (Mt 27: 51, 54). This is a moment of seismic consequence, affecting all of creation, and affecting too the temple, with the curtain of the temple torn in two from top to bottom, Jesus through his death symbolically ripping away the barriers that stand between humanity and God, and opening up the way into God's fullness of life and living presence.

As we contemplate again today and this week the Passion of our Lord, we will see Jesus enact what it means to be the Resurrection and the Life. But first we will see Jesus follow the way of the Cross to the end in all humility and humanity, to drink to the depths the cup of suffering, to surrender up his life in a great act of self-giving love on the cross.

And we are called to journey with him, to bring all our senses to bear as we watch and wait and weep, to allow the familiar words to sink from our heads to our hearts, and to bring ourselves just as we are, with our real lives and our own present daily surrenderings to stand together at the foot of the cross. May we do so together this week and so honour Christ crucified and present among us. Amen.