

13th April 2014 Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Psalms 31: 9-16

Philippians 2: 5-11

Gospel: The Reading Of The Passion Of Our Lord According To St Matthew

These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word

Palm Sunday acknowledges the entry of Christ into Jerusalem; the “triumphal entry”.

For us, this is our entry into Holy week and our turning toward Easter. And today we read through the ‘passion narrative’ from Matthew’s gospel as if we were looking at a road map, so that we can know where we are going.

We approach Easter, together with the whole church, and we carry with us a triumphal anticipation, symbolised in the palm crosses that we carry.

However, as we replay the gospel narrative for the 2000th + time, let’s hit the pause button and look more closely at the first Palm Sunday.

We see Jesus on a donkey, processing through a crowd on both sides of the road waving palm branches and shouting with joyous celebration.

As we hold the paused image, look and see where we can find the church in that picture. Yes, we are there each and every one of us, in the crowd, shouting and waving; bishops, priests, the old and the young, even the pope is there waving a palm branch. We can see in one part of the crowd some of the St Paul’s congregation, and there’s the choir singing Hosanna in three part harmony.

Look even more closely and we’ll find just about anyone and everyone who has ever attended church somewhere there in the crowd.

But... something is not right.

When we look back to our road map, the gospel; the picture that we’ve paused and looked at makes no sense.

During Lent we referred to another road map, we looked at the gospel of John as we sought a way through the wilderness; John’s roadmap covers the same landscape as Matthew’s map, but it gives us some additional signs.

If you remember we looked more closely at the signs the healing of the blind man, and also the raising of Lazarus..

Such road signs help with our direction; they give some sense of perspective to the overall road map.

So let’s go back to our paused image of Palm Sunday; nothing has changed; but this time let’s zoom in on the figure of Christ, the man on the donkey.

We zoom in and there we see the detail, the crowd become fuzzy as we zoom in to the face of the man on the donkey, we zoom in till the face of Christ fills the screen and when we zoom right into that face, what do we see?

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We see each and every one of us, shouting and waving; bishops, priests, the old and the young, even the pope is there. We can even see some of the St Paul's congregation, and there's also the choir singing Hosanna in three part harmony.

Now it all makes sense...

When we look at the gospel road map, we have to look closely to see where we fit into the picture...

Before we zoomed in, we saw ourselves only in the crowd; and for most people that will be their road map that will take them to Easter..

For centuries the Church has only seen itself in the Palm Sunday crowd, watching Christ play out the drama of the passion.

But those who look closely, those who 'zoom in', they will see themselves in the face of Christ, and they will see the true church in that same face...

If we claim to be the body of Christ then today is our day on the donkey, this is our entry into the passion of Easter, and it is not a spectator sport.

During Holy week we have a road map, and we have signs that will lead us to the Easter Mystery, but we also need to find our part, and take our place on the path that is mapped out in the gospel.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you"

"Drink from it, all of you"