

Sermon – 10:00 Palm Sunday – St. Peter's.
Go, What, Why, Hosanna!

Mark 11.1-11.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

My mum is a bit of a republican. By that, I don't mean the American kind. But, when I was growing up, we never watched the Queen's speech on Christmas Day because my Mum objects to the phrase 'loyal' in the Queen's opening line of 'my loyal subjects'.

But (joking aside) loyalty is a key feature in today's gospel reading. So is the nature of authority. And so are words. These words take the form of the dialogue in this morning's gospel. Take a look. We'll follow four through our passage this morning.

Let's start with Go.

Go...

Go. Our Lord's word of command. Jesus had been gaining popularity up until this point despite his best efforts to keep a low profile. In this word, Jesus makes himself conspicuous, and sets in motion the events allowing this triumphant entry to happen – even encourages it. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is not described as being 'triumphant' for no reason. It is the peak moment before the events of this week. Jesus, in his words to the un-named disciples, gives us our push to enter this Holy Week.

Go ahead of me into the city. Our (invitation) to enter this Holy Week. Imagine, now, we are those unnamed disciples, asked to go on ahead to make the preparations. They walk in,

unknowing what will happen – with just a promise that something will. And it does.

They walk in, unknowing what will happen; just with the instruction that if anyone comments on the attempted theft of a donkey, to explain that The Lord needs it and it will all be okay.

It was.

This is the first surprise of Holy Week and introduces us to the mood of the crowd.

Our first question in the gospel reading is:

Why?

Why? Our second piece of dialogue.

We are still with Jesus' two disciples – following our command to go and find a specific donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem.

But why? Especially, why the donkey?

It is to do with authority – and how it is shown. To use the Queen again, Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey is much like the Queen riding around London on a bicycle.

Donkeys were not the most elegant way to get around – or even one of the most acceptable modes of transports. But, as one of my lecturers said, wisely, I have found, 'Jesus knew exactly what he was doing'. Jesus is making a very clear point about who he is. He is a King that prefers a beast of burden.

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It is not a subtle gesture of Jesus. He is no longer trying to be inconspicuous. He knew that most of the crowd would be familiar with the words of the prophet Zechariah – as much as we might know the strains of ‘Zadok the Priest’ as the coronation music.

The prophet Zechariah writes ‘Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey- riding on a donkey's colt’.

And so, for the crowd, at that moment is a sign of hope that leads on to our penultimate word.

What?

Palm Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week where the crowd that waved Jesus in in triumph will shout that they want to see him crucified. On Sunday, they lay down their coats for him and a donkey to walk over. On Thursday, they cry out for him to be killed.

This can be an uncomfortable mirror for us, who form our modern day crowds, in our various walks of life. How often do we see this behaviour, I wonder? How often do we see this in public life, amidst the workplace politics, and our own interactions between other?

We can so easily be fickle with our words and affections. The question ‘What?’ is so often our first word of indignancy, when

faced with information we don’t like, and our pride seems slighted – to which we respond without thinking things through.

The people of Jerusalem were easily swayed.

We have before us a week to observe Jesus’ example amidst the most testing times. If we are attentive, some aspects of God’s love and grace will reach us even amidst the dark places of our own character.

Not all of us have the insight of Jesus – but we can all seek to cultivate it.

We need Holy Week to remind us of ourselves – in our good and bad. At the start of any ideal week, we might begin on a Sunday, upbeat and refreshed – any teachers enjoying their half term may identify at this point. But as the week goes on, our energy gets depleted, we start to grumble – the spark seems to fade. We start to feed a grudge, stew on a situation, narrow our focus to getting only ourselves through – never mind calmly proceed to our own death. But Jesus did. That leads on nicely to our final word.

It is Hosanna!

The crowd’s greeting remains in the heart of our thanksgiving prayer in the service of our Eucharist ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!’.

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Following the King on the Donkey, we can turn them upside down. A journey through Holy Week is mapped out in the speech of our reading.

- 1) Hosanna! Celebrate today – a respite from a long Lent. Let it bring us hope, as it did for the crowds of Jerusalem.
- 2) What? The practical question. What is it about this Jesus? What are we hopeful of?
- 3) Why? Why do we have hope? Why is this person important?
- 4) Finally, come full circle and ‘Go’. Go ahead of him, as he sends you disciples into Holy Week.

Go through it towards a transformed way of life, with him.

Amen.