

The Triumphal Entry

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[0 : 00] So in today's reading from Mark, it's for Palm Sunday, and it records the event that we've come to call the Triumphal Entry, which is Jesus riding a donkey into the city of Jerusalem, starting off Holy Week.

This was the final week of Jesus's life before he was betrayed by Judas. He was arrested and he was put to death on a cross. And then he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, one week later.

And for Jesus, it's all been coming towards this point, this culmination. We've heard stories time and time again of his miracles, displays of his divine power, his teaching and how he interacts with other people, especially the outcasts and people on the margins.

And also, as he's predicted his death, the disciples still don't really understand it, but he's predicted his death several times.

And now we come to the story itself, and there's a lot going on. Jesus and his disciples arrive at the villages of Bethpage and Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem.

[1 : 15] And it seems that Jesus has planned well ahead. He knows that there's a cult of a donkey that the disciples will find tied up outside somebody's house in the nearby village.

And he knows what those people are going to say when the disciples go and get the donkey. And he tells them how to respond to them. And all of these things happen, just as he said.

So maybe he was planned and organised, or whether this just shows how divine he was and that he knows everything about what's going to happen. Maybe it's both. But anyway, the two disciples bring the cult, throw their cloaks over it, and Jesus climbs on the back of it.

And he rides along and makes his descent into Jerusalem. There's lots of people lining the road, both sides, crying out, laying their cloaks on the road in front of him, along with their palm branches that they've cut.

Now, I wonder what this actual scene was really like. How do you picture it? From a child, I've really pictured it as a time of joy and celebration, a bit like a carnival, with Jesus getting on his donkey and riding the short distance, pretty much in a straight line.

[2 : 36] And then going back a little way into the city and then hanging out in the city with the people as they're celebrating and chanting. And it being very joyful.

And everybody's happy to see him there, bar the religious leaders. But I actually wonder what was going through his mind. Was this journey intended to reveal his divine kinship to the world?

Or was it just a coincidence? We can guess, but we don't actually know. The distance he had to go on this journey wasn't very far, maybe five or six hundred yards, it says.

However, in order to get there, he had to go through a really dark and steep valley called the Kidron Valley now. And today, each side of this valley is actually filled with graves.

It's literally a place of death and a graveyard. So Jesus would have looked across the valley. I think it would have been nearly evening. The sunlight used to be going down soon and the valley probably getting darker with every moment that passed.

[3 : 45] So this wasn't going to be an easy and a simple journey that he was going to make. And I wonder what was going through his head when he saw all of this. Was he full of joy and expectation or was he concerned?

I wonder whether he was afraid yet because he knew that in five more days he was going to die on that cross and sweat with blood and agony. I wonder if he was thinking about that.

And you know what? It would have been so easy to say, I don't want to do this and just get off the cult and walk away. But he didn't. He knew what he had to do, regardless of the consequences.

So he rode down into that deep, dark valley. And then he came up to go into the city. He'd just got enough time to have a look around the temple and then to walk right back out the same way he came.

And what about the people that were following along behind and in front and the side of him crying out Hosanna? I wonder what they were thinking when they cried out Hosanna.

[4 : 51] This word is still important 2000 years later. It's a word of praise and excitement. And also one that maybe makes us think of children running around the church waving palm crosses.

But the word Hosanna means save us now. So they were saying save us now, you in the highest heaven. These people were the Jewish people.

They were lining the streets. They were going to celebrate the festival of Passover. And this festival was celebrated every year to remember the action that God had taken so long before in Egypt.

That God took in response to 400 years of crying out in agony for God's mercy and deliverance. And now, many generations later, these descendants of those people who'd experienced for so many years enslavement from the empire after empire.

They're shouting save us now. Perhaps they hoped to be saved from the Roman army and Roman control. Perhaps they saw this man entering triumphantly and thought, at last, God's chosen ones are here.

[6 : 03] He's going to get rid of the Romans and beat them and we're all going to be free. So were they joyful in this moment? Was it the big parade or the carnival that we often think about?

Or were these cries of Hosanna actually full of pain and sorrow? Were they begging God to set them free? Perhaps this man could set them free.

Maybe it's both. Maybe both happening at the same time. So these two different responses, maybe of joy and of sadness, I think they're examples of what it means to be human.

Because nothing is straightforward. Within any crowd, there's going to be some people there who are feeling joy and happiness. While at the same time, there's going to be other people there that because of their circumstances are experiencing pain and sorrow.

And maybe there are some who are feeling both at the same time. And for all of us here joined together, watching online in our different places. We're all in different situations and we've all got different things going on.

[7 : 14] And I'm sure that's the same for us as it was for them. So as Holy Week starts today, some of us are going to be going into it feeling joyful and some are going to be feeling sorrowful.

Some are going to be excited and some are going to be feeling pain. And you know what? That's completely fine. That's to be expected. Feeling this mix of emotions and thoughts shows that we're alive, that we're human.

We know that Jesus laughed and we know that he cried. We know that he felt both amazing joy and terrible agony. And we know this because Jesus was fully God, but he was also fully man.

And we're going to remember that as we actually move through this week. Jesus came to bring the kingdom of heaven near to us. A kingdom that was going to be filled with love and delight that God feels for all of creation, for all of life.

Because to God, all life is precious, even that of brokenness and pain. So through Jesus, God was showing the world the perfect way of love.

[8 : 28] But the world said no. On that Good Friday, we'll remember that in the literal face of love, the world rejected him and killed him.

But then on Sunday, God says, it's not finished. Now Easter is not yet here, though we do celebrate him rising every day.

So today, allow yourself time to be human and to feel whatever it is that you need to feel. Think what you need to think, even if it's joy or even if it's pain.

Or maybe it's both. Remember too, that we have a God who can and does continue to willingly enter into the places of pain and death and darkness and brokenness.

In order to bring us the light of new life. Amen.