

Who do you say that I am?

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[0 : 0 0] So, as Andy mentioned earlier, we've been focusing on Palm Sunday today. A certain politician! called it Psalm Sunday earlier this week. I don't think that was intentional, but it's! quite a nice description as well, isn't it? But I'd like to read a passage that Mike read in the service this morning. And also pick up on some of the things that John was sharing in his sermon, and it's lovely the way that everything sort of links together, even the bits that aren't specifically about Palm Sunday. I might start calling it Psalm Sunday. Anyway, let's read from Matthew chapter 21, beginning at verse 1. Sorry, it's a bit small, but it's up on the screen there. I'm going to read it from my Bible. It's the same version, but there might be the odd words that are just different. As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there with her colt by her.

Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away. This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet. Say to the daughter of Zion, see your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this? The crowds answered, this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. Amen.

So I just want to pick a few things out from this passage and then give us a few thoughts to take away with us this evening, and hopefully into the week as we move through the next few days towards Good Friday and Easter Sunday. And if you read the Gospels, there's a huge percentage of the Gospels, John could probably give you the figure that's dedicated to that particular week. And it's right that we give it our focus and attention. But I just want to pick up a few things from here. First of all, it's a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. We often talk at Christmas and at Easter itself about the verses that point to the birth of Jesus and then the death and the resurrection of Jesus. And you've got Jesus on the road to Emmaus after he's risen and explaining the scriptures and all that's gone on. But I like the fact that in this, there's also quotes from scripture and it talks about the bit, here your king is coming riding on a donkey. It's mentioned in Zechariah and in Isaiah as well. But this is all part of that narrative and all part of God's amazing plan. Secondly, we note that Jesus chooses the way of humility. I don't know if any of you watched Sarah Mullally being enthroned as the Archbishop of Canterbury on Wednesday. I didn't because I was working, but I've seen photos. And there's a lot of pomp and ceremony because she's holding a very important position in the Church of England and lots of fanfare and so on. But Jesus didn't choose to enter Jerusalem in that way, even though he was king. He came in humility on a lowly donkey. And if you look at the other three Gospels, which all have this story or bits of this story, most of them state that actually he rode on the colt. So that was the foal of the donkey, not even the donkey itself. So he was really lowering himself. He wasn't riding in on a big charger or a chariot. He was on the donkey's foal. The crowds were caught up in the excitement of the moment. Everybody likes a celebration. Everybody likes to cheer at things. They threw all the coats on the road. They threw the branches on the road. I'm afraid I'm very practical and if I'd be thinking that's going to get really good. But anyway, the crowds were caught up in the excitement of the moment. And yet a few days later, those same crowds were calling for Jesus' crucifixion.

They were very fickle. And I also, it made me think as I was reading this passage again, the last verse, or the last two verses where people say, who is this? And the crowds say, this is Jesus. He's a prophet. There's a complete misunderstanding of who Jesus actually is. They described him as a prophet. And okay, they thought prophets were important, but that's definitely not the same as God. They misunderstood who Jesus was. So just, next slide please, Josh. Just some things for us to consider this week.

[5 : 58] I've already mentioned that this is all part of the narrative, but it's really good when we're thinking about God's plans, not to rush through them, but to remember that God planned before the creation of the world that he was going to save us through Jesus. But that wasn't just a sort of, well, that's the general idea and then I'll sort out the details later on. He knew what was going to happen, that Jesus would come as a tiny baby, be born in obscurity, live in relative poverty, and then he would have a ministry, a preaching ministry for three years, and then he would go to Jerusalem. But as part of that, he would ride on a donkey. He wouldn't come on saying, look at me, aren't I important? But he would come in humility. I also like the reminder, this incident takes place against a backdrop of chaos and uncertainty. The Romans were in power. The Jews didn't like that.

Even some of the Jewish leaders were pretty corrupt. There was a lot to moan about. There was lots of conflicts going on elsewhere in the world as they knew it. And if we look at our world today, I mean, probably sometimes it's not too good to dwell too much on what's going on in the world because it can be quite scary, quite alarming. There's a lot of chaos, a lot of conflict and uncertainty. But I like the reminder from this passage that God is in charge of the narrative. God's purposes stand firm throughout eternity. And that includes in this incident in the life of Jesus, but it also includes in our current times. And when we're struggling with the uncertainty, let's look at Jesus and remember that God's plans stand firm.

Second, following on from that, God's ways are not human ways. There's a verse in Isaiah that talks about my ways not being your ways. And it's quite an easy one to trot it off. But actually, sometimes we think that God's way should be the way that we want it to be done. You know, and we pray about things and expect God to answer in the way that we want him to. So I like the reminder in here that the emphasis that Jesus came in humility. If you want a challenge, read Philippians 2, 5, which says something like, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

And then read the verses that follow that talk about him coming in humility. He humbled himself and became obedient to death. You know, when I think about, is my attitude like the attitude of Jesus?

[8 : 43] Well, sometimes, no, it isn't. And that's, it's quite an uncomfortable verse to meditate on, but it's a great verse in reminding, in terms of reminding us of how we should become more like Jesus.

We choose the path of humility. And as Jesus chose to come and follow his destiny, follow God's plan in humility. So when we seek to serve him, we should be doing that from a place of humility. The disciples were obedient. Again, when Jesus says, go to that village, there'll be a donkey there and a colt, just bring them to me, it'll be all be fine. And there's no sense of it, or there's nothing written in the text that the disciples are saying, you what? You know, have you set this up beforehand? Have you arranged this? Are they going to accuse us of stealing it? The disciples were obedient. Even though maybe Jesus' request seemed a bit weird. And probably if they'd known what he wanted it for, they would have been, you know, no, can we find you a nice horse or, you know, somebody important to walk in front of you at least. But the disciples were obedient. And there's a question for us there about, do we trust God's direction? Even then, maybe it feels a bit weird.

Or especially when it feels a bit weird. Do we listen to God? Are we obedient? So I'd like to give you something particular to ponder on this week.

John, in the reading this morning, one of the bits he focused on, I forget the exact quote, but it's about the disciples saying, where else should we go? Or to who else should we turn?

[10 : 27] You have the words of eternal life. And I came to this passage before I knew what God was going to say about that. But I think there's a real challenge for us here in terms of, do we understand who Jesus is? Do we think it's a nice story? Do we think it's something to sort of gloss over before we get to Easter morning and the bacon sandwiches? Or do we take it seriously? Do we think about who Jesus is? And the implications for us? So I just want to go back a few chapters in Matthew and read from Matthew 16. It's a passage I'm sure you all know well. When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say the son of man is?

He's referring to himself.

There replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Back to the idea of Jesus being a prophet again. But what about you, he asked, who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. And I suppose my challenge to myself and to you this Easter is just to reflect on those words. Do we truly understand who Jesus is when he says, you know, who do you say that I am? Do we acknowledge that he is Lord, that he is the Messiah? He's not just a prophet. Or do we allow ourselves to be swept along with the crowds and what people are saying? Let's remind ourselves this week that Jesus has the words of eternal life, that he came into Jerusalem as part of God's purposes so that we might have life in him.

Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for the opportunity to reflect on this story again.

Thank you that Jesus was willing to walk that path of humility, to be obedient to you. And as we move towards Good Friday and Easter Sunday morning, I pray that you'd help us just to sit with that idea of walking in humility, walking in obedience.

And that we wouldn't wait till Easter Sunday morning to acknowledge who Jesus is, but we would declare clearly and sincerely that Jesus is the Christ. He is the one who has the words of eternal life.

[13 : 12] Father, I pray that you'd stir that life up in us this week, that your name might be glorified. Amen. Andy, can I just share something else, please? Yes.

Just when John was reading through the reflection and I came back to a song that I wrote quite a number of years ago, but it just sort of stuck in my head. So I'd just like to read the words and hope that they speak to somebody here.

Beautiful child of God, that's what you've called me. Precious and dearly loved, the apple of your eye.

And I cannot fathom the love you have for me. My heart is overwhelmed by your grace. And I shall not fear when there's darkness all around.

For you will be there with me and I will be your child. Holy and blameless one, that's what you've made me. Bought with the death of your son, his perfect sacrifice.

[14 : 24] And I cannot fathom the love you have for me. My heart is overwhelmed by your grace. And I shall not fear when there's darkness all around.

For you will be there with me and I will be your child. Amen. Amen.