

A THOUGHT FOR PALM SUNDAY

This week, I read the story of a little boy who was sick and was not able to attend church with his father on Palm Sunday. church with his mother. His father later returned home, a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked his dad why he had the palm branch and his father told him "when Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honour him, so we got palm branches today." The little boy looked disappointed and replied, "Typical. The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!"

This Sunday is Palm Sunday, and sadly, there will be more than that little boy missing out on their palm crosses. On that day there was no social distancing, no isolation. All the pilgrims for the forthcoming Passover feast were on the streets celebrating with one another. The whole city was buzzing.

You can imagine the heightened anticipation of those followers of Jesus. If the scenes which confronted them were right, something big was going to happen. We know that, by the end of the week, it would, but not quite as the followers of Jesus and the psyched up crowds imagined. The pilgrims were there to celebrate freedom from slavery in Egypt, a deliverance orchestrated by God. Through the sacrifice of lambs and retelling the story, the people remembered.

It is into this that Jesus rides, on the back of a donkey. Not the obvious symbol of a great conquering hero, but as one who comes in peace, fulfilling the prophecy outlined in Zechariah chapter 9. I often wonder whether Jesus' mind was completely at peace on this occasion. The journey to Jerusalem had been in the planning from before the very foundations of the world. The purpose of the journey, Jesus tried to relay to his followers again and again. As he looked at them, I wonder just what his thoughts were. They were caught up in the moment, cheering, singing, dancing, laying clothes on the ground for the donkey to walk over. But, only he knew how those cheers would change to jeers. How the cries and shouts of welcome would turn to those of condemnation. How arms open in welcome would turn to rejection.

Yet still he rode on. Those who remembered what God had done for them in the past, failed to recognise what God was doing before their very eyes, in the present. To a world that was suffering, Jesus arrived, centre stage in history. He came to bring comfort to those who mourned; healing to those who were ill; freedom to those who were oppressed; salvation to all under the condemnation of sin. As the lambs had been sacrificed in the past and would be sacrificed that week in atonement for the sins of the whole world", rode into Jerusalem to, as it were, "seal the deal" by his own sacrifice on the cross on Golgotha.

This year, churches will be closed – but still Jesus comes. Social isolation means people cannot come out – but still Jesus comes. Social distancing separates people from one another – but still Jesus gathers up in his arms to comfort, to heal, to free from the fears which have held us during this time. To those who give him no thought – still Jesus comes. To those who welcome him – still Jesus comes. May we recall all that God has done in the past in each of our lives and may we remember with thanks, all that he continues to do, even in these uncertain times.

"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord..." – read the story again – Matthew 21 verses 1– 11; or Mark 11 verses 1-11; or Luke 19 verses 28-40; or John 12 verses 12-16.