

Humility, Love & Forgiveness

Palm Sunday Reflection

29th March 2015

This Sunday, we gather to remember the passion of Jesus and to enter into its mystery. The story of Jesus' passion is filled with drama, violence and suffering. Yet, the key messages are about peace, love, humility and forgiveness. It is a difficult story for us to hear, and to journey through, but we cannot hurry through it; it slows us down as it unfolds. We hear the story today on Palm Sunday, and we hear it again on Good Friday. It draws us in, even when we would rather turn away, as we relive the shocking brutality that Jesus suffered. A shocking brutality, that is, sadly also evident in our world today, in places where life is not valued.

Jesus enters Jerusalem being hailed as a King and a hero – he had healed the sick, and raised the dead to life; normally a triumphant King, entering a city, would enter on a regal chariot with a stately stallion, flanked by soldiers in a victory procession. Jesus' entry was very different – he entered Jerusalem on a colt – the foal of a donkey. His followers laid palm branches before him as he made his way in. His entry was not one of flourish and flair – he entered Jerusalem in meekness and humility. The colt and palm branches are symbols of the peace that he offers to his people. His earthly beginnings were humble – born in a stable and laid in a manger. His final days on earth were also humble – the wood of the manger, replaced by the wood of the cross.

Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem; betrayal, rejection and crucifixion. Yet, he entered willingly into it, enduring all of these on our behalf.

We encounter several examples of Jesus' betrayal in the story of the passion. The betrayal of Jesus by Judas shows us a man whose loyalty was undermined by his desire for money – he sold his loyalty to Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. He thought he could get a better deal by siding with the High Priests' soldiers.

Is there an element of Judas in us?

Do we sometimes stray away from the right path because we think that we might gain more in the short term by following an easier path?

A second example of betrayal is when Peter denies Jesus 3 times. Peter was one of the good guys yet when it came to the crunch, through fear, he denied that he knew Jesus – his human weakness overtook his honourable side in the moment.

Do we sometimes experience situations where we are paralysed by fear and find it difficult to make the right choice?

A third example of betrayal is when the crowd who welcomed Jesus with jubilation when he arrived in Jerusalem later turned on him to demand the release of Barabbas and to ask Pilate to have Jesus crucified.

Do we sometimes allow ourselves to be pulled along with the crowd instead of standing up and speaking out when we see an injustice?

There is a significant message of hope for us in the midst of all this betrayal - despite the fact that Jesus knew Judas would betray him he still chose him as a disciple. Despite the fact that Peter was not courageous enough to identify himself as a follower of Jesus, Jesus still chose him as the rock on which to build his Church. Despite the fact that the crowd turned against Jesus he still laid down his life for them.

The message for us is that God's love for us is so immense that he is always ready to forgive us and walk with us, guiding us in choosing the right path and helping us through the rocky patches. We are called to be steady in our trust of God, even when our hope is challenged. The passion is a clear reminder that even those that stumble are given the opportunity to be forgiven and continue to spread the good news; to be signs and bearers of God's love and compassion to those that we meet along our journey.