

2021-03-28 ... Palm Sunday 10am Sermon ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt

Mark 11 v1-11

'Palm Sunday Extravagance'

Prayer

Introduction ...

Are you an extravagant person?

What do you think of extravagant actions or events?

I ask these questions today because the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem was surrounded by extravagance ...

God's extravagance

Often, in our Christian discipleship, we're reminded of God's extravagance:

- Unconditional love
- The changing of water into those massive quantities of wine
- The feeding of the 5000 with so much left over

But in today's Gospel reading – it's the crowd who are extravagant ...

Those who threw their cloaks on the road – they didn't necessarily have another few coats at home – like many of us. Their cloak was a treasured possession.

Why would they do this?

They might have remembered Jesus' own words about willingly giving up their cloaks ... and they might well have had in mind an Old Testament occasion from 2 Kings chapter 9 when again the people spread their cloaks for a new King – King Jehu. I expect, though, that it started with one person and then the crowd followed suit.

That's so often the way.

And as they did so ... excitement grew ... as it does in crowds ... and their hopes began to grow – political, religious, social hopes – all mixed together ... and extravagance of gesture, of gift, of commitment grew ... cloaks, palm branches and a litany of shouting and praise: ***"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!"*** Echoes here of Psalm 118.

As an aside – notice the presence and role of a crowd. People will do things as part of a crowd that they wouldn't do without being part of that "something bigger". This can be good and wholesome or it can be evil and destructive. We often remember the role of the crowd on Palm Sunday compared with Good Friday. What a change and it's true in our time now ... remember the role of crowds rampaging through and stealing from town centres in recent years in this country ... but also the way in which something like Red Nose Day – even with Covid-19 restrictions – brings people together to donate generously.

PTO

Remember, too, how the actions of one person can spark a change in behaviour of a crowd – maybe sometime you can be that person who sparks off something good for God.

Back now to the theme of extravagance towards Jesus – we don't need a crowd for this. At the start of the Gospel passage, we had the gift of a donkey (although only Luke's gospel names the bystanders as the owners of the colt) – that was extravagant.

We're asked to mirror, to act extravagantly because of, the extravagance of Jesus towards us; extravagance we heard about in our reading from Philippians: he gave up everything – emptying himself and humbling himself ... being obedient even to death on the cross.

So as you picture Jesus entering Jerusalem ... join in with the praise and be open to what you could lay down as 'your cloak' ... what do you have, who could you be ... that would enable Jesus' work to grow and bear fruit? Be extravagant!!

Let's have a short time of quietness to do this reflection now(pause)

Now a chance to respond, in the form of a creed based on that passage from Philippians; the words of response are: **We do believe:**

Do you believe that you must have the same mind and heart as Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not count equality with God as something to be grasped at and so humbled himself even unto death?

We do believe:

Do you believe that you need to humble yourself and become the servant of God and the servant of others, relying on Jesus' strength?

We do believe:

Do you believe that you are called to be obedient to God even to death, bearing your share of the sufferings of the cross, for others in the world?

We do believe:

Do you believe that God highly exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the name by which we are saved?

We do believe:

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father?

We do believe:

This is our faith. This is our hope and salvation. We ask the strength of the Spirit of God as we follow the way of the cross this week with Jesus, who is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen

(Adptd.(c) 1997 Megan McKenna "Lent: The Sunday Readings" Orbis Books)