**‘A ride on a Donkey’**

**Matthew 21: 1-11**

Over the last two years donkey’s or at least one donkey in particular have taken a central place in the life of our family, particularly for our youngest grand daughter Hollie. Two years ago we decided as part of her birthday present to sponsor a donkey in her name for the princely sum of £3 per month at the Donkey Sanctuary near Sidmouth in Devon. A beautiful place to visit if you are ever down that way.

Since then ‘Ruby’ has become a large part of Hollie’s life, she has learnt a lot about her due to the various pieces of information, including photos, Birthday and Christmas cards she gets sent from the Sanctuary but the coup de grace is being able to watch her online and follow her movements, I understand she watches her for a while most days and when in Devon visiting her Auntie, always pays a visit to see ‘Ruby’ in person. ‘Ruby’ is actually a bit of a rascal and once managed to unlock the enclosure gate letting all the donkey’s into the next field!

Donkey’s were of course well known in Jesus’ time, both as a means of working and travel, however there is more to this particular ‘donkey ride’ into Jerusalem than at first meets the eye.

Jesus came to fulfil Old Testament prophecy and it was no less the case on this occasion riding into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives thus fulfilling scripture and prophecy from Zechariah *‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey’* (Zechariah: 9.9)*.* This was indeed no ordinary donkey ride!

The people recognised this entry and its symbolism and welcomed Jesus rapturously with shouts of praise “Hosanna to the Son of David’ ‘Hosanna in the highest’ and ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’. They spread their cloaks on the ground and cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road too. They truly thought that the time had come for their ‘King’ to rescue them from the clutches of the Roman occupation! You see they were expecting a warrior king, a physical and military liberation, but they were to be disappointed because Jesus kingship was still to be revealed and it was revealed in a most shocking way a short time after through his violent death and of course his triumphant resurrection.

Jesus clearly stated that his kingship was not of this world! This was very different to the people’s expectations and indeed their mood changed as the week went on from one of triumph and disappointment to one of grumbling and complaining, many turning on Jesus and calling for his head, “Crucify him” was their cry.

We must pause here and ask ourselves a question? Why do we offer praise to Jesus? Do we love him simply and sincerely? Do we worship him for who he really is? Or do we actually care more about how he might fulfil our own aspirations and dreams?

Sometimes it can be hard to take scriptures like this one which shows Jewish history and tradition and translate it into what it can mean for us in today’s world and how we should live, but I think there are a few clues that may help us here.

We read that Jesus rode humbly on a donkey, hardly the most glamorous ride into town especially compared to the white stallions and presence of the leaders of the Roman armies as they led their troops into battle, and indeed as we look at his life we can certainly see this played out.

Not for Jesus the way of ‘celebrity’ acclaim, he did not insist on publicity, popularity and getting maximum exposure, much of his life was hidden as he went about God’s work and this is so different from the ways of this world, God often prefers to work in secret and what he does seldom take place in public, if we are looking at celebrities and their movements, looking at the latest trends and fashions then we are looking in the wrong place.

Jesus spent his days working with the insignificant people of his day, the outcasts, the disfranchised, those that would love him for who he was, with a grateful heart for what he had done for them, not for self or public acclaim. And as it was for Jesus, it must be for us too, he sets the example for the church to follow.

So how does the church witness to Jesus in our world? Firstly and foremost by giving visibility to his love for the poor and the weak. Our world is so hungry for healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and above all unconditional love, our calling is to seek to alleviate that hunger through its ministry. Indeed, whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the lonely, listen and pray with those who are rejected, when we love, accept and support those who struggle with identity, gender and security issues, when we go to those on the margins of society we can trust that we do indeed proclaim the living Christ!

***May we all know God’s blessing and peace in these strange times as we enter Holy Week and head towards Easter.***

With much love and blessing!

Ken Clark