

## PALM SUNDAY 2009

### What is this day for you?

Imagine how it was, as if we were there. We're there with the crowds lining the streets outside Jerusalem, cheering on this wonder man; this Jesus who's been working miracles, healing people, getting rid of demonic powers. All the city is in turmoil, waiting for his arrival, this man whom everyone is saying is the Messiah, the King, the one who is going to start a rebellion and finally drive out the Roman rulers with all their harshness, their cruel crucifixions. And maybe he'll clean up the Temple leaders, too – the ones getting fat being such buddies with the Romans. Maybe it will all happen this Passover. Maybe this man will be the one expected; the one promised in the Scriptures, the one who'll set us free.

Imagine how it is then, over the next few days. There's no rebellion. No sign of any challenge from this Jesus; just an angry outburst in the Temple, when he turned over some tables and cracked a whip. Instead, he's walked straight into a trap, and he hasn't even stood up for himself. Is he Messiah, or what? Looks pretty weak to us all. Can't even save himself. What d'you say? Might as well string him up on the cross. Crucify him. Crucify him. Yell it out good and clear. If he can't help us, we're not going to stand up for him. He's just another bitter disappointment. That Barabbas –the one arrested for starting a riot –he shows more potential for saving us.

And so the whole tone of the city changes in a few short days. From agitated fervour to defeated sighs; the crowd turning on him in their frustration, disappointment, anger. Projecting –dumping- all their oppression, all their vulnerability and powerlessness onto him – the old, old story of those without power turning against one of their own for five minutes of feeling more powerful. Crucify him.

Have you noticed how the liturgy –how the words and movement of our service – echo that movement from the cheering crowds into a more sombre tone? We stood outside this morning waving our palms and cheering our hosannas. But we moved inside- as if into the city, where there's dark business to move through on this walk to the cross. Right through a whole week of solemnity –tonight, in the ancient service of the shadows, Tenebrae; then every night this week; then Maundy Thursday as enter into the events of that last night –the betrayal by Judas, Jesus' washing of his disciple's feet, the institution of the holy communion; Good Friday – that most abject of political and religious assassinations, the brutal execution of our Lord. This week – starting now –invites us to follow and gauge where we are in our following.

What is *this* day for you? This isn't just a 2,000 year old story. All of us are somewhere in this story, today.

Are you among the crowds, outside the city, waving and cheering, but not wanting to enter in any further than this? Do you want to hold onto a Jesus that you won't be disappointed with; a Jesus who will fit your expectation of

a mighty king and Messiah, healer and epitome of niceness? To stay in that crowd, outside, leaving his suffering and death unseen, means not having to face a vulnerable Jesus who doesn't fit our prescriptions, who doesn't do or be the expected; who in fact can so confront and turn upside down all expectations and fantasies that the cities of our lives can be thrust into turmoil, begging change of perspectives about who and what God is.

Are you among the crowds that have edged closer, following him, watching and waiting and hoping that he'll turn things around. Standing there with the big unanswered question- if this guy is who he says he is, why does life go on being so hard? But still you're hanging in there.

Or – maybe you've been in the crowd, yelling “crucify him”; hurt and angry that things haven't worked out the way you surely could see was best; wanting something more, something other; like the crowd clamouring for Barabbas, wanting to try something, someone else that would work better.

And then there's the disciples, his closest friends – still hoping for political revolution; the reformation of society. Justice. But it all ends in tears; hope fades to despair and shame and fear; and their allegiance turns to denial as they see this fabulous man surrender; apparently giving up. Crucified. Dead. Where's the victory in that?

Or maybe –you're there, following him through all the initial excitement and then through all the betrayal, the torture and the execution, with a sense that God is with us and is part of our human suffering and injustice, part of our deepest longings and struggles. This God who is with us, willing to go through all of this, even for those of us who don't want our ordered lives disturbed and disrupted by knowing him too closely, those of us who are disappointed in him, unsure in belief, angry at him, even those who yell “crucify him”.

Where are you in all this? What's this day for you? Will you follow Christ through this week, allowing him to disturb and disrupt the city of your life?