

This week we have an ending and a beginning. It is the end of our term's teaching series on the Sermon on the Mount: we have taken 11 weeks scratching the surface of the 'Good and Beautiful Life' that beckons us when we commit to the discipline of spiritual transformation. However, the series may be ending, but our commitment to spiritual formation is a life-long adventure that should see us all gradually becoming more like Jesus.

We also have a beginning: we are at the start of Holy Week: the annual pilgrimage the Church Worldwide makes from Palm Sunday, through Maundy Thursday to Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday next week: **Mark 11: 1-11**

1. The First Palm Sunday.

- After 3 years of a travelling ministry with an aura of secrecy in small towns and villages, Jesus joins the hundreds of pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. He joins them riding on a donkey.
- Suddenly there is no secrecy and Jesus is being heralded as the long-awaited Messiah. People throw cloaks and branches before Jesus, shouting 'Hosanna' = 'God Saves'. **Mark 11: 7-10 & Psalm 118: 25-6.**
- They shout songs of praise and victory all the way into Jerusalem but within days those 'Hosannas' for Jesus as God's chosen King had turned to 'Crucify Him'! Why the astonishingly rapid change of heart?

2. The Jews' Hosanna.

- **The Messiah the Jews want Jesus to be is not the Messiah that He actually is:**
 - At Passover they were remembering their miraculous escape from slavery and Egyptian oppression.
 - Now they were ruled by another oppressive power: Rome and they craved a 2nd liberation.
 - Their Hosanna was loaded with their hopes and dreams for Jesus the Messiah who would give them independence, religious and political freedom and military victory: for that Jesus they said 'Hosanna'.
- **Jesus does not deliver on any of these:**
 - He creates havoc but not in the courts of the Romans but in the courts of God's temple.
 - He publically insults the Jewish leaders, not the Romans. He advocates paying Roman taxes.
 - He publically warns people – not against the Roman soldiers, but against the Jewish teachers.
 - Jesus' message is acutely alien to the salvation they want. In a few days the call is for His crucifixion.

3. This Palm Sunday – Examine our own 'Hosanna'. With what is our Hosanna loaded?

- Do we herald Jesus as our King, but expect Him to do the things we want for ourselves? Do we want to make God in the image of our own hopes and dreams or our own version of freedom or victory?
- This Messiah invites us into a relationship with an altogether different kind of King whose Way is not of power, privilege and prestige, but of self-sacrifice, servanthood and suffering. The days of glory and liberation DO come, but in God's time, according to His agenda, in His sovereignty and on His terms.
- Jesus' Way is not popular and not easy and is only found by the few. **Matthew 7: 13-14.** It's the Way of sacrifice, service and suffering but it is also the good and beautiful earthly life which leads to eternal life!

4. What do we need to keep us on the narrow path of spiritual transformation?

- We need each other, we need church, we need a community of faith to grapple with God's word together to challenge each other and hold each other to account. We'll learn sacrifice and servanthood together.
- The Christian life is 'a long obedience in the same direction' (Eugene Peters), like the Marathon des Sables which involves running a marathon every day for a week across the Sahara desert and is advertised as needing (merely!) self-discipline, determination and a will to reach the finishing line. Most runners ended on their own, except the Chinese, who all crossed the finishing line together. They stick together all the way and go at the pace of the slowest member. They finish together in one group and everyone is happy!
- Together, our knowledge and love of Jesus will deepen and **we'll grow in the holiness that leads to glory.**

Points to ponder:

1. *A conquering King would have arrived on a horse, Jesus riding on a donkey signified humility. But He spoke out strongly against injustice in the temple and during His last days before arrest. What a great balance!*
2. *How does our 'Hosanna' stand up to scrutiny?*
3. *Following Jesus in sacrifice, service and suffering can be costly, frustrating and confounding.*
4. *'We need church, we need each other'. Have we examples of this truth in our lives?*
5. *What has the Holy Spirit challenged you to tie to the cross and deal with through the cross of Jesus?*