

Sermon for Palm Sunday

The text: Luke 19:28-44

The coming of Jesus Christ riding on a donkey into Jerusalem, which we celebrate today, is a beautiful moments of glory, praise and thanksgiving. At last the Messiah, the King of the Jews has finally come! God himself has come to his people and all the Jews of Jerusalem should have all welcomed their King with open arms.

But the response to Jesus is sadly quite mixed. Jesus' disciples and other members of the large crowd celebrate him, but the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders stand there scowling and frowning at their King. They wish to truly spoil the party.

But this is not a surprise to them. They knew Jesus was coming. Jesus as he approached Bethany did all the appropriate cultural practices of a true King or visiting member of state. Created originally by the Persian King Cyrus, visiting Kings and officials in the Middle East engaged in a practice called 'angaria' which everyone understood. You sent a representative ahead of the visit to borrow a donkey or horse from someone for official state business and there was often very few questions asked. So when the disciples obey Jesus and get the colt they utter words to the owner: 'The Lord, or the master needs it'. That signaled that someone important was coming and so the borrowing of the colt was culturally allowed.

Furthermore, as Jesus the King of Kings comes closer and closer to Jerusalem, people lay down their coats, palms and branches on the ground, creating a passageway for Jesus to ride through. It's an exciting time when Jesus finally comes close, and the disciples are shouting out and praising God. But then suddenly a disapproving voice rings out: 'Teacher rebuke your disciples!' Jesus is very quick to answer: 'If they remain silent even the stones will cry out!'

This is the turning point in the journey, where happiness turns to sadness. The Pharisees, blind to who Jesus really is, are shamed by simple stones! Even inanimate objects of creation know more about the Messiah than the Pharisees do!' This is a true case of the Pharisees 'missing the moment'.

Some words begin to get highly descriptive. In the original Greek language the stones are said to 'shriek out'. It's hard to know whether the stones are crying out in praise or they are crying out in protest because of the disapproval of the Pharisees. But now it is Jesus' turn to cry out. As he gets close to Jerusalem's walls in verse 41 Jesus doesn't just shed a few tears, he cries a loud lament, his heart burnt with pain and anguish. In his pain he says:

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

This is a striking prophecy from God himself, of the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. The Romans did indeed build an embankment and surrounded it. They starved it to death causing terrible suffering, and then once inside killed thousands. But those stones of the temple were also all truly overturned just as Jesus said. Jewish historian Josephus records that as the temple stone walls were lined inside with pure gold, once it was all set on fire, the fire melted the gold, and it ran into the crevices of the stones. The Romans then got large crowbars and overturned every stone so that they could search for that melted gold.

This indeed was a tragic case of Jerusalem 'missing the moment'. They had rejected and crucified their own king, and that rejection created a chain of rebellious events that would lead to the Romans destroying the temple. Jesus came to bring them peace, but their stones were overturned simply because they did not recognize God's coming to them.

Friends, today we celebrate the coming of our King our Saviour. And he regularly comes to us in our lives in so many different ways; in his word the Bible, communion, through people, through events, and also through little things too. Although we do experience the coming of Jesus into our lives we also can miss him too. Sometimes we are too caught up in our own anxieties, habits and distractions. We can be so caught up with our Facebook feed we might unconsciously ignore a little child whose drawn a picture of Jesus and is very busy tugging at our legs to tell us all about it. That may be another form of God coming to us, yet we might be too busy or too distracted to notice.

But even though we can be like the Pharisees sometimes, where we are blind to God's coming, we can be thankful that God is gracious and keeps on coming to us. He finds other passages and gates into our little 'Jerusalems' and he lives to help us and bless us. As Christians, we have the Spirit of God inside us. The Spirit not only forgives our missed moments but also helps us see the beautiful moments that Jesus comes to us in our lives; people like friends and family that he puts around us, as well as the small joys and innocent moments of young children. He reminds us of the words Jesus speaks to us as he comes to us through his word. He points us to fix our gaze on Jesus our King who has come to us, who continues to come to us through his word and sacraments, and the King who will come again.

During this Holy week and the weeks ahead, may we all see and experience more of God's coming to us, and rejoice in the wonderful truth that we are his people, whom he loves dearly.

Amen.