

Dear Friends,

Mark 10: 46 - 11: 11

In a few weeks, it will be Holy Week which ends with the celebration of Easter. This is the most important week in the Christian calendar. Sometimes it feels as though it goes by too quickly. I'm left wishing we had more time to think about the events that take place. So, this year I'm going to stretch out Holy Week and give it about five weeks instead of the usual one, and I'm going to start it today.

In Holy Week, Jesus goes deep into suffering and humiliation. As we share with him in that journey it's important that we remember who he is. We've just been looking at the story of the baptism of Jesus. Then, the heavens opened and the voice of God said, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased". Since then, the identity of Jesus as God's Son has often been a bit hidden. There have been times when his friends have had insights into who he is but he has made them promise to keep these insights secret. However, with the cross approaching the gospel writers want to make it clear that the crucified one is God's own son who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

Mark shows us this even before Jesus makes his big entry into Jerusalem. As Jesus is passing by, Bartimaeus a blind beggar calls to him from the crowd. He keeps shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me". Bartimaeus may be physically blind, but he has spiritual insight. He knows that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God's chosen one. All that is declared in the title by which he chooses to address Jesus. As Jesus begins the last stage of his journey, Bartimaeus opens our eyes to who he is.

Then, Jesus is on the edge of Jerusalem. So far, he has walked everywhere. Pilgrims would usually walk for this last stage of the way to Jerusalem. But not Jesus. He sends two of his friends to get a donkey for him to ride. And he does not want just any old donkey. He wants one that no one else has ever ridden. It was understood at the time that a king's animal could not be ridden by anyone except the king. If the friends of Jesus are challenged when they take the donkey, they are to say, "The Lord needs it". The word "Lord" was used in a variety of ways. It could simply mean "The owner needs it". The word however was also used for God. It is likely that this is the sense in which it is being used here. It is the only time in Mark's gospel when this title is used for Jesus. Mark wants us to know that Jesus who is heading directly towards suffering is the one who has absolute authority over all things and every person.

The picture of Jesus on a donkey is usually seen as revealing his humility. That is part of the message. But it's not the whole message. His authority is also being proclaimed. Everything he needs is placed at his disposal. His friends carry out his instructions. The perfect donkey is made available to him. He rides that animal rather than walking with all the other pilgrims.

Jesus is coming to the end of his journey to Jerusalem. But his long journey into suffering continues as he takes the final steps in the way that leads to the cross.

God bless you,

Tony