

A Palm Sunday reflection by Tony.

There was a party atmosphere as Jesus entered Jerusalem and many acts of generosity from the crowd. The cloaks that were laid on the road, where they would be trampled and ruined, had a greater value than the coats we wear today. The branches had value too, having been cut to celebrate the Festival of the Booths (which celebrated the harvest at the end of the agricultural year and was a time of rejoicing and thanksgiving for God's blessings on their crops), just like the cloaks they were given up in the excitement of celebrating Jesus.

The people greeted Jesus enthusiastically, waving the palms. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" the shouts of "Hosanna" meant "save now," and the palm branches symbolised goodness and victory.

Certainly we can never know what was going through the hearts and minds of each person there in the crowds, but we can imagine that for many, when they cried out Hosanna, they were asking to be saved from the Roman empire at the time. These were political cries, political hopes in a Messiah, a King who would come and defeat the Romans, who controlled Jerusalem. The act of throwing one's cloak down on the ground was a sign of homage and submission of laying one's self down, in hopes that the coming King would be able to bring deliverance.

But why did Jesus choose such a humble mode of transport to deliver him to such a milestone in his ministry? He was making a point he was enacting a passage from the prophet Zechariah, who described an all-conquering king who would remain humble enough to parade on a donkey. Jesus is that great-yet-humble King.

The Coming King of Zion

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zechariah 9:9

Tradition imagines young Mary and her unborn child riding a donkey into Bethlehem before the first Christmas. In a fitting bookend, Jesus rides a donkey into Jerusalem before the first Easter. This common pack animal carries the Saviour to his birth and to his death.

So today, who would Jesus considered to be, would he be a hero or a celebrity? There seems to be many people from the greatest to the least who have been hailed either or both of these titles, from those who have served or those that are just popular because of their media exposure. From the likes of the late Captain Tom who had a decorated war career and became an amazing fundraiser for the NHS, to retired music teacher Paul Harvey while suffering with dementia composed a music score from just a few notes and achieved more than two million hits on Twitter in just two days and was seen on television worldwide.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem he seems to be both of those things: well known and acclaimed, like a celebrity; but also recognised as one who is worthy of praise.

How do we see Jesus?

A good person from history, or a celebrity from the past?

Where would you have been in that Palm Sunday crowd – on the edge and hanging back? With the crowd that acclaimed him? Or with those who turned on him days later? In today's world, how do we show that Jesus is someone whose life, death and resurrection have meaning for us now?

So many people are seeking, so many are confused, this world is changing radically day by day. Wherever we find ourselves, full of doubt or trusting in a loving and generous God? We need to fervently pray for revival so that people can know that in all the blackness that might surround us, in the depth of darkness there is a light that cannot be extinguished the blazing flame of the Holy Spirit that fought all the darkness on Good Friday and lives for evermore.

"Hosanna"

I see the King of glory
Coming on the clouds with fire
The whole earth shakes

I see His love and mercy
Washing over all our sin
The people sing
The people sing

Rising up to take their place
With selfless faith
With selfless faith

I see a near revival
Stirring as we pray and seek
We're on our knees
We're on our knees

Heal my heart and make it clean
Open up my eyes to the things unseen
Show me how to love like You have loved me

Break my heart for what breaks Yours
Everything I am for Your kingdom's cause
As I walk from earth into eternity

Hosanna in the highest!

Amen.

(Song copyright - Brooke Fraser)

<https://youtu.be/hnMevXQutyE?t=20>