

Dear Friends,

Mark 11: 7-11

Crowds of people are travelling into Jerusalem. Almost everyone is walking. The one exception is Jesus. He is on a special donkey that no one else has ever ridden. A donkey that has been set aside for this special purpose. Jesus is being proclaimed as the one who has absolute authority over all people and things.

Those travelling with Jesus show respect and reverence to him. They do the equivalent of rolling out the red carpet. They lay leafy branches from the fields in front of him. They take their cloaks and spread them before the hooves of his donkey. It is a symbol of their offering of their lives. Each one is saying, "I lay myself before you. I am no longer my own but yours. I freely and whole heartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. Do with me as you please".

The crowds shout "Hosanna". At first this word was used as a cry to God for help. It means "save now". It was a prayer for God to act in a decisive and final way by saving the people from foreign domination. But by the time of Jesus, it was less of a plea and more of an expression of praise. The crowd are cheering and acclaiming Jesus.

Jesus comes with authority. But we also see how he chooses to use this authority. By the time that Mark's gospel was written, there had been another triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This entry was by the Roman Emperor Vespasian. Jewish people had formed an uprising against their Roman rulers. They hoped that the time had come for them to be free. But Vespasian had acted decisively. He rode into Jerusalem on a horse. He stripped the temple of its treasures and then destroyed it. He oversaw the massacre of about half a million Jews and took others as prisoners of war.

As Mark writes his gospel, he has these contrasting pictures in mind. The recent picture of Vespasian and the older one of Jesus. He wants people to see the difference. Jesus is not like Vespasian. He has all authority in heaven and on earth but he uses his power humbly and gently. He comes not on a horse ready for war but on a donkey bringing peace. Mark does not quote the old words from the prophet Zechariah, but maybe they were in the back of his mind. The other gospel writers do draw attention to the connection. Zechariah looked forward to the coming of a gentle king who would bring peace. He pictured it like this, "Behold, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations". Jesus is like the peaceful king for whom Zechariah hoped, not like the blood thirsty Vespasian.

Mark tells us that after entering Jerusalem, Jesus went straight to the temple and had a look around, but it had got a bit late, so he left and went to Bethany where he was staying with his friends. That feels like an anti-climax. The crowds had been

cheering him, all the signs were that he was coming as king. But in the temple, he looks more like a tourist seeing the sights, than a king coming to take his throne. And what's happened to the crowds? They seem to have all deserted him and fled. Matthew and Luke tell the story in a slightly different way. They describe Jesus entering Jerusalem and immediately causing uproar in the temple by clearing it. Mark's not ready to tell that story yet, maybe he's saving it for later.

God bless you,

Tony