

MESSAGE - Welcome or hostility?

10 April 2022 – Palm Sunday

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 118:1, 19-26, 29 \(responsively\)](#)

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

**This is the gate of the Lord
through which the righteous may enter.**

I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
**the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes.**

The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.

Lord, save us!
Lord, grant us success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
From the house of the Lord we bless you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

[Luke 19:28-48](#)

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ‘Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” say, “The Lord needs it.”’

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They replied, ‘The Lord needs it.’

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’

‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’ ‘I tell you,’ he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘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 recognise the time of God’s coming to you.’

When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. ‘It is written,’ he said to them, “‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it “a den of robbers”.’

Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people kept looking for a way to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people were spellbound by his words.

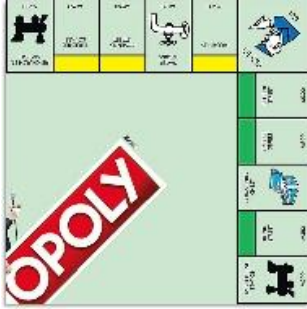
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I wonder if you’ve ever made plans to visit a great city of the world and dreamed of what it would be like when you got there.

My first ever overseas trip was to start in London, where Liz and I would stay with some of her relatives. It was a long and tiring journey.



But when we had recovered a little, our hosts drove us through the streets of



central London and it was a bit like a dream as we passed by all these places and streets that I only knew from the Monopoly board – Piccadilly, Trafalgar Square, Fleet Street, Regent Street, Park Lane. I've been back to London several times but never tire of walking its streets.

I wonder if there was a similar level of excitement for the disciples of Jesus as they neared the end of their journey, the city of Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish world, a city built on a high plateau with its large and striking temple. Perhaps for many of them it was their first visit to Jerusalem ... and to be arriving there in the company of their amazing leader, Jesus.



They are filled with joy as they recall all the deeds of power they have seen Jesus do – healing the sick, bringing new life to many, feeding thousands of people. From what they have seen and heard they are convinced that Jesus really is **the Messiah**, the hoped for king of Israel, the one who will bring freedom from the rule of Rome, the one Zechariah prophesied about way back at the start of Luke's story – the Redeemer of Israel, the mighty Saviour, the one who will guide the people into the ways of peace.

Now was surely the time for Jesus to claim his rightful place as king.



Jesus' arrival is carefully stage managed. He has walked the entire journey from Galilee, but for the final 2 kilometres down from the Mount of Olives he will ride on a young donkey. It seems a strange choice for someone arriving as a king.

But given the careful arrangements made, it was clearly a deliberate choice by Jesus, a symbolic action making some sort of statement. Whether many of the onlookers picked it up, Jesus

was probably living out a prophecy from the book of Zechariah:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
triumphant and victorious ...
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
... he shall command peace to the nations,
and his dominion will be from sea to sea.
(Zech 9:9-10)*

So yes, Jesus is arriving as a **king**, but a king bringing **peace**, a king who is triumphant over sickness and over human need rather than a king arriving with a show of military power and force. He represents no direct threat to Rome and his followers are no would-be army.

The people are singing a line from Ps 118 – a song sung by many pilgrims to Jerusalem – celebrating the victory procession of God’s king – who was surrounded by enemies but was saved by God’s



powerful right hand. Jesus is that victorious king. The people sing ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord’. Another line from this same psalm that Jesus will quote later in the week is ‘the stone that the builders rejected is in fact the cornerstone of what God is doing’. Jesus comes as a king, then, and his followers are celebrating accordingly.



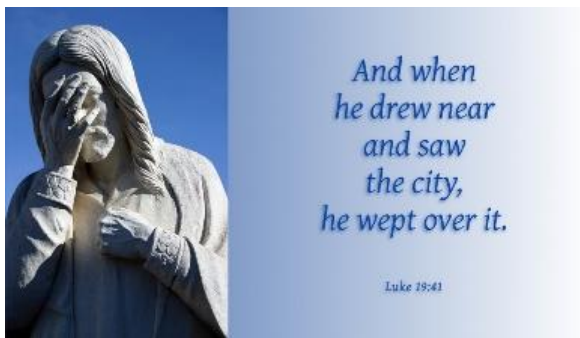
Luke also suggests the people were singing about **peace in heaven** and glory in the highest heaven, which recalls what the angelic choir was singing at the **birth of Jesus** – ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favours’.

This is a moment, then, to praise what God has been doing through the ministry of Jesus and

to look for **peace** (or **wholeness**) that only God can bring – both on earth and in heaven.

The underlying message is that **God** is at work here. **God** is acting through Jesus ... doing what Zechariah prayed for right at the start of Luke's story ... and bringing hope and redemption to God's people.

The party mood is dampened by some Pharisees who urge Jesus to stop the noise of his followers and their claims that Jesus is king. Jesus responds that if his followers were to be silent, then the very stones would cry out; namely that creation would join in the celebration.



But if Jesus is the one who can bring peace, it seems that the city of Jerusalem and its people will not welcome this peace. If they could only recognize in Jesus a visitation from God, a sign of divine presence, and embrace Jesus then

all would be well ... **but no**, they do **not** recognize Jesus and the opportunity will pass them by. In coming decades, Jesus foresees, the city will be utterly destroyed, just as the Russians are currently doing to the Ukrainian city of Mariupol.

And so it turned out to be when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.

In Ps 118, the king proceeds right into the temple. So too does Jesus, but no longer in party mood. He drives out the people who have turned the temple courts into a **marketplace** rather than a place of prayer. The inference is that the priests in charge of the temple run it more like a **business** than a place to meet with and worship God.



Jesus directly challenges the practices and priorities of the chief priests and

scribes – the people responsible for the temple – thus setting up a showdown as to who has ultimate power and authority. The temple leadership want to eliminate Jesus, but the common people hang on his every word. And so the stage is set for Jesus' final week in Jerusalem.

Jesus riding a donkey ... the people singing Ps 118 about a victorious king coming in victory ... Jesus seeing his coming to Jerusalem as a visitation from God offering peace ... the provocative cleansing of the temple and restoration of true worship ... all these signs point to Jesus acting as the **Messiah** or **king**. As our sign says, though, will the leaders and the people in Jerusalem **welcome** Jesus as the Messiah? or will they be **hostile** and regard him as a messianic **pretender**? ... We know how the story will go from here.

Fast forward 2000 years and Christians of all persuasions are still following in Jesus' footsteps as **peace-makers** and still doing so in provocative ways – including the peace marches around Australia that have been a feature of Palm Sunday since the mid-1980s.

The focus of these marches has varied through the decades – from **anti-nuclear** to protests over Indonesia's treatment of **East Timor**, from protests about the **wars in Iraq** and **Afghanistan** to a focus in more recent years on Australia's cruel treatment of

refugees and **asylum seekers**, which is again the focus of this afternoon's march, beginning outside the State Library at 2 o'clock.



So it seems appropriate to finish the message today with an opportunity for us to spend some time **praying together for peace** in the midst of so much anguish and turmoil in the world.

But where do we start?

Who do we pray for when the needs seem so overwhelming?

And how do we pray?

This morning we will follow a recent suggestion made by Kathryn that we pray through music and song.

So we will sing two songs.

We'll remain seated and you're invited to listen to the music while you pray.

There will be no song words projected but rather some images.

Feel free to pray with eyes closed or with eyes open.

During the first song you are invited to pray for the **people of Ukraine**.

During the second song you are invited to pray for **refugees** and **asylum seekers** here in Australia and those still on Nauru and in PNG, many of whom have been detained for 8, 9 or more years despite breaking no laws and committing no crimes.