

SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBRY: GEOFF CHADWICK: LENT6b: Mk 11:1-11

PALM SUNDAY

“CRUCIFY HIM”

I would like you to imagine that you were in the crowd in Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday when Jesus arrived. Imagine you are a Pilgrim and have walked several hundred kilometres to get to the city. Many are travelling along with you and they share your ambition to worship in the temple. It is the time of the Passover festival and there are great crowds of people pressing on you. The atmosphere is one of expectation. Finally you see the holy city in all its splendour: how wonderful it is to be close to your final destination! Behind you, you hear a commotion; you wonder what is going on. You turn to see a man riding a donkey. Someone says:

“It is that famous prophet called Jesus; he's going to the temple!”

People are shouting, others are pulling branches off the trees, and others are dropping their cloaks onto the road as a sign of welcome. Everyone is excited;! and why wouldn't they be Here is a hero! A miracle worker! A healer! A great teacher! Possibly the Messiah! Surely he would lead us to victory over the oppressive Roman rule. Here is someone coming as a king! Coming to rescue us!...

The crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem is no different from us. I believe that if we were there, we would join in the action. We would rip branches off trees and shout with the crowd.

Something similar happens to me when I go to the footy. The crowd changes me. I become a noisy excited person ready to agree with all the Fremantle supporters and quick to sneer at any supporters of the opposite team. Yes it is easy to be fired up by the mob and follow the crowd.

Now, I want you to imagine another crowd. Possibly a different group of people, but nevertheless, you are in the crowd. Gilate the Roman governor appears before you and he is wishing to release a prisoner. But there is a choice: either a known criminal called Barabbas will be released, or Jesus the so called "King of the Jews". The crowd is to decide.

Who would you choose?

Do you wish to shout "Jesus?"

But there are people around you (including some specifically planted to influence the decision) who shout "Barabbas! "

You wish to disagree, but louder they shout. Then the person behind you, the person in front of you, and then the people beside you begin to shout for Barabbas. People glare at you because you are not shouting; they jostle you and demand that you shout! The atmosphere is electric and riotous, the decision is made. Barabbas is to go free and Jesus is to be condemned.

Then Pilate asks you:

"What am I to do with the man you call the king of the Jews?"

"Crucify him!" they yell, and louder in a united chant that echoes around the courtyard

"Crucify him!"

What would you do?

I think if I'm honest, I would have shouted with the crowd, not only because of the frightening atmosphere, but also because Jesus didn't behave at all like a victorious king.

I think we all would have had been party to Jesus' crucifixion if we were there.

Some of us at this moment maybe thinking:

"No that's not true I would have stood by Jesus!"

But I wonder.

Remember these events happened before the resurrection. There is no evidence compelling enough to believe that Jesus was the Christ. We have the benefit of hindsight. We know the end of the story, but if we had been there at the time, I think we would have behaved in the same way as the disciples.

Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him three times, and all of the disciples abandoned him when he was arrested.

I think we too would have done the same and left Jesus to face Pilate and the crowds alone.

We too, would have been like Polate, to listen to the crowd and hand Jesus over.

We too would have shouted "*Crucify him!*"

Yes I think we would have crucified Jesus.

Judas betrayed Jesus. Perhaps Judas wanted the Lord to bring in the Kingdom by force and was disappointed things were not turning out the way he wanted. So he tried to do things in his own way. How often have we wanted to manipulate God? We haven't got what we wanted so we've tried to force his hand. We've questioned him, argued with him but not trusted in his answers. We've turned from God because we think we know better.

I think there is an element of Judas in us all

But what of Peter? He denied Jesus three times, and I am sure that I have would have done this.

Someone says to me in an aggressive voice:

"Aren't you one of those churchy people?! You don't believe in any of that religious stuff do you?!"

I remain silent or avoid the issue or say:

"No not me."

Then the person replies:

"But I saw you standing outside the church lands last Sunday when I drove past in my car."

Yes it's very easy to deny that you know Jesus.

What happened when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus?

The disciples abandoned him. They left their best friend behind when the going got tough.

Isn't it refreshing to know that the disciples behaved just as we might.

I wonder how often we are tempted to leave Jesus behind when the going gets tough?

However, Jesus did not abandon his disciples. He stood there and faced all the horrors that were inflicted on him and he remained faithful to God and his followers. He remains faithful to us, and forgives us when we abandon him or disappoint him. It is because of this that we are able to change our shouts from:

"Crucify him!" to those of:

"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.