

## **Palm Sunday**

**Mark 11: 1-11**

*Pictures of Palm Sunday - Michael Brown*

### **Introduction**

If you happen to know the Brandling Park area of Jesmond, you may have come across a house plaque dedicated to Ludwig Wittgenstein who is regarded by many people as one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century.

In September 1941, LW took leave from his professorship at Cambridge and went to work as a hospital porter in London. He got to know the members of a small research unit which moved up to the RVI in April 1943 and took LW with them as a laboratory assistant. He lived in lodgings first in Jesmond, then in Benwell and left Newcastle in February 1944.

One of LW's better known sayings was 'A picture held us captive'.

### **Palm Sunday**

On the first Palm Sunday, did their picture of the Messiah hold the crowds captive?

Does a picture of Palm Sunday hold us captive?

### **Today's Gospel Reading**

The First Sunday in Lent, we saw Jesus was driven out into the wilderness. Today, the last Sunday in Lent, we see Jesus drive the action, we see Jesus drive the drama.

'....just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" With these instructions Jesus is not only giving the two disciples a pre-arranged code, he is

also using a well-known social formula. Under Roman rule, certain people were entitled to 'impress' (a word like that in 'press gang') animals for recognised purposes such as carrying the mail from one post house to another. And people with this level of authority would probably be addressed as 'Master' or 'Lord'.

However, this isn't just any suitable animal: '*you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden*'. The deliberate choice of this particular horse suggests that it was fit to be ridden either by a king or for some sacred purpose.

What we have in this short reading is a prophetic sign, not a spontaneous gesture, not something done on the spur of the moment but a deliberate act planned in advance by Jesus. Pilgrims would usually walk into Jerusalem. Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem. Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem in a special way. This sort of prophetic act can be described as 'messianic'. All that means is behaving like a messiah would be expected to behave. And by this dramatic action, Jesus is making a claim to be a messiah.

But did Jesus plan the cheering crowds? Did Jesus want the acclamation he got? Jesus says nothing, Jesus does not wave to the crowds, Jesus simply goes on his way.

We can say that the crowds were held captive by the wrong picture of Jesus. How many times have we pictured Jesus as 'meek'? A meek prophet indeed!

Was everyone in the crowd cheering? Were not some of the crowd simply watching and waiting? Were not some of them simply walking as fast as they could to keep up with the messiah mounted on a horse.

Perhaps the message of Palm Sunday (and of Holy Week) is that we don't need to cheer. Watching, waiting, and trying to keep up with our Lord is all he asks of us.

## **A Hymn for Palm Sunday: ‘A Cheering Chanting Dizzy Crowd’**

(Words by Thomas Troeger. Tune: ‘In Christ There is No East or West’.)

A cheering, chanting, dizzy crowd had stripped the green trees bare,  
And hailing Christ as king aloud, waved branches in the air.

They laid their garments in the road and spread his path with palms  
And vows of lasting love bestowed with royal hymns and psalms.

When day dimmed down to deepening dark the crowd began to fade  
Till only trampled leaves and bark were left from the parade.

Lest we be fooled because our hearts have surged with passing praise,  
Remind us, God, as this week starts where Christ has fixed his gaze.

Instead of palms, a winding sheet will have to be unrolled,  
A carpet much more fit to greet the king a cross will hold.

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## ***LET US PRAY***

### **The Collect for the Sunday before Easter Commonly Known as Palm Sunday**

*ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### **Concluding Reflections**

We may think of the Book of Common Prayer as an ‘old’ prayer book and the various Collects as ‘old’ prayers. In fact, nearly all of the Collects are much older than the 16th century BCP. Today’s Collect goes back to the middle of the 8th century. It is translated from a book which contained the prayers to be said by the priest during the celebration of the liturgy.

But the themes of this prayer go right back to that first week which we now call Holy.

- The patience of our Lord for his disciples when they constantly misunderstood him.
- The perseverance of our Lord through humiliation, injustice and to death.
- The triumph of our Lord in his resurrection and his rule as a servant.

May this patience, this perseverance and this triumph be granted to us. ***AMEN***