

Sunday Thought

28th March 2021 Sixth Sunday in Lent Palm Sunday

Readings

Isaiah 50: 4 – 9a

Psalm 31: 9 - 16

Philippians 2: 5 - 11

John 12: 12 – 19



A Different Victory Parade

I selected this impressive picture of a national parade – troops marching in immaculate, colourful uniforms – all in step and formation representing years of training and practice – surrounded by flags, music and cheering crowds. The picture is not like scenes I could have used from Russia or North Korea glorifying their powerful armaments but they are all in stark contrast to the picture of Jesus' Palm Sunday 'Come as you are' procession. Any soldiers present in that one could well have been standing at a distance, jeering and laughing. To them this was 'child's play'. It was in fact an enactment of age old prophecy and dreams of the triumphant Messiah coming into his home city.

Jesus' parade had been inspired by an amazing miracle just a day before when Lazarus of Bethany had been called to life again following four days in his tomb. Now the Messiah - the life-restorer – headed his recruits, mounted on a donkey they had borrowed early that morning. His followers tore branches from the roadside palms. These were their flags of triumph. No trumpets sounded but soon they were singing the ancient Passover processional hymns. Reaching the heart of the city and the Temple many of the street children joined in the songs. In the temple the 'religious' were worried and angry because it seemed *the whole world was joining him*. They expressed some of their irritation in complaints about the rowdy children – *they shouldn't be running and screaming in the House of God!*

Jerusalem had had its fill of more spectacular and threatening Roman victory parades, meticulously prepared and with discipline equal to ours today. Some more travelled observers would have seen 'the real thing' in Rome itself. I wonder what Jesus' disciples were thinking? One of them, Simon, was called *The Zealot* and others were also sympathetic to the beliefs of that political group. Zealots were a comparatively recent movement who believed the Messiah was coming with force of arms to rid Judaea of the Romans and their tax burdens.

It is not surprising that some of Jesus' close followers were confused. Their master didn't advocate armed force. He spoke of selfless giving and caring – of even giving one's own life in the cause of peace. His weapons were not swords and spears but arms of love carried by an army marching on their knees! In our gospel reading John observes – *The disciples didn't understand at the time but it all made sense to them after Jesus had been raised to glory.* Paul, writing to Christians in Philippi, echoes John's comment as he copies out one of the church's earliest hymns in praise for Jesus. The words give us a picture of our Lord's continuing victory parade – loving its way across the world.

I presume there will be no palm crosses distributed in church this year but maybe, like me you'll have a few from past years tucked away somewhere. I wonder if the first disciples kept relics of their palms - mementos of that Passover festival? I hope so. They certainly kept their memories of how the parade continued. They wound their way to the Temple and the procession went on as Jesus taught, healed, worshipped, shared fellowship. It went on as another crowd dragged him from the garden of Gethsemane to his civil and religious trials. The parade moved ever forward, stumbling towards the Cross while women wept and disciples deserted. On and on beyond resurrection, ascension, Pentecost - across centuries – into our today. It became a glorious parade of obedience, service, suffering, foot-washing love and marches ever onward across the world proclaiming Jesus as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

All over the world today Jesus' followers are waving their palms.
I'm getting mine out again! You too?

A Prayer

[From Psalm 31. The writer complains he is worn out with life's troubles, but he is still trusting God. This is the essence of his prayer.]

**Lord, there is always love.
You are constant love,
Always coming to me,
Even when I find it hard to turn to you.
I welcome you with open hands.**

