



Who is the man on the colt? Where is the King?

Have you ever been in a crowd straining to see an individual where everyone wants to get a piece of the action, have the best view, hear his or her voice, even touch their hand? Perhaps you have waited to see the Queen pass by, or glimpsed the Pope mobile, or perhaps stood on tip toes to see the rock star or queued to hear a great speaker like Archbishop Desmond Tutu.... Then if the answer is yes to any of these, or we have seen this happening on TV, we can sense something of the excitement, the sense being alive, of losing oneself in the moment and the anticipation that something is about to happen.... This is what the crowd experiences when Jesus enters the city through the gate of Jerusalem.

It's Passover. Everyone is coming to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover- a celebration that remembers the account in Exodus of how, through Moses, God delivers the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians and leads them to the Promised Land. Emotions are running high, national identity is felt keenly and mixed into the celebration of a past deliverance, is a deep yearning for liberation from their current Roman military occupation. In the throng, people are waving palm leaves and shouting out, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” To the crowd this would have been instantly recognisable. It’s a direct quote from Psalm 118. And guess what? This is a Psalm of Thanksgiving and has many references to the book of Exodus. But the Psalm is doing more than thanking God for the rescue of their ancestors from Egypt – its calling upon God to once more ‘Save us and grant us success’ (verse 25). The Psalm itself is a cry for salvation internalised by a people who were regularly surrounded, attacked and their very existence as a nation threatened. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” is not a polite acclamation of one sent by God; it’s also a political slogan and to some a battle cry.

Yet in less than a week, it will all be over. The Jewish elite will conspire to remove someone who they see as a religious and political threat and the people will be shout for Jesus to be crucified.

Back to the joy and acclamation of Palm Sunday as Jesus the King rides into Jerusalem: What do the people see? The promise of a change in their immediate circumstances, a return to past glory, a king with a golden crown of their own and a national identity restored. They cannot compute that Jesus arrives on a colt, the lowliest of animals. Even though, in the scriptures, Zechariah is still speaking to them, “Lo your King comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (9:9)

The Colt communicates all about a leadership and power that is not evident in the experience of an elite led Jewish community enduring a long occupation by Imperialist Rome. When they realise Jesus will not give them what they want- their joy and acclamation easily come by, easily fades. The people cannot see that the promise of change concerns the heart and soul, the glory will be the victory over death itself, the kingship concerns the kingdom of God and Jesus’ death will be for all humanity rather than just one nation.

The joy that Jesus offers is very different to the fleeting- fair-weather joy, great for the festivities but to be abandoned when the social and political coast is too great. For Jesus, joy is about being in union with God the Father,

obedience to whom, will lead to an agonising yet glorious death – glorious because of what it means and brings for all.

What do you and I see: a failed uprising, a sad powerless leader damned by the corrupt leaders of his own people and overcome by a Godless imperial power?

Who do we see? A historic figure, an idealist who temporarily caught imaginations, a holy man whose wisdom and spirituality were as no other but who sadly, was out of his depth when it came to authorities of his time, but who, nevertheless, can still move us today?

Or do we see the real deal? A man on a colt moving towards his destiny, to a point in history when, the whole cosmos will never be the same again. When the sky will darken and the crowds grow silent, the earth shake and the temple curtain split in two as, the son of god dies on a cruel cross. When what we see as worldly weakness and failure leads to the triumph over not just his death but all of death and suffering. The transformation of an earth to which God's kingdom continues to come. Can we see the cataclysmic shift in the human world?

The whole world cries out for healing and Jesus says, "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near." (Mark 1:15). Let us unravel the power of sin and death, come to worship and to live as God intended with him and one another. I am the means of by which you and all peoples are to be healed.

Such joy is anything but fleeting- it is life changing, world changing. Far more than any earthly leader can offer.

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