

Sermon – 17-4-11 – Palm Sunday – Matthew 21:1-10

Have you ever peaked at a later chapter in a book you are reading?

You want to see the **outcome** – you want to see what all this pre-amble is leading to – you want to know **who dunnit**.

Satisfied with that knowledge, you then settle down to read the book.

Passion/Palm Sunday is rather like that.

We begin with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (*the story you heard in the gospel reading*) then (*later this morning*) we jump immediately into Jesus' trial before Pilate and take that final journey with him to his death.

It is almost like we want to peek further on in the story to see if what we suspected would happen actually did.

In the **passion** gospel today we do just that.

We jump ahead to the meat of the story.

There's no account of his preaching in between – nothing of all those parables – no issue of the great commandment to love – no institution of the Last Supper – no agony in the garden – no betrayal – no arrest.

We want to know just what this bold move of Jesus led to and this was indeed a bold move.

Jesus was asking for it!

At the moment, we are watching – or being forced to watch – the moves of our party leaders in the lead up to the election on May 2nd.

They are very careful **not** to make the wrong move – they have to be politically correct – they have to see that they don't ruffle any feathers.

Any spin doctor will tell you that, if Jesus wanted to claim kingship over the Jews, that ride into Jerusalem was stupid.

And by skipping straight to the trial and crucifixion we are confirming that premise.

We are saying – **‘Now that was a dumb move!’**

The events of Palm Sunday are shaped dramatically by the politics of the day.

The Romans are in power, ruling with an iron hand.

The Jewish community is divided into various factions, each trying to hold on or claim power.

If there was television in those days, they would, I am sure have had debates as to who had the right to make the laws.

For some, such as some of the Pharisee's, maintaining the delicate balance of peace with Rome and tempering the rising Jewish nationalism was critical.

Others were in full scale cooperation with Rome, and some in various degrees of rebellion against Rome.

The Romans were crucifying anyone who upset, rebelled, or broke a major law in order to 'maintain order'.

Things were tense and none of the leaders, Jewish or Roman, were interested in lighting the match that would explode the powder keg Jerusalem had become.

Enter Jesus, leading a growing band of cast-offs from the country and whipping a crowd into a celebratory frenzy (think about it – how did the Roman's hear those cheers of "Here comes the king"?).

Being Passover, the Jewish national pride was soaring frighteningly high and the city was crowded with outsiders – some of whom were spoiling for a fight with anything Roman.

Order was hard to maintain.

Not the best time to have someone declared king.

You **can** continue to read the story of the next few days – Jesus going after the powerful temple tradespeople and the very banking interests of the Temple.

But you can see **Jesus is asking for it**.

You can **guess** what the outcome will be but you just want to peek ahead to see if you are right.

After all, Jesus **was** a trouble-maker and something had to be done.

How many great leaders can we name that are assassinated in order to be silenced?

How often is killing presented as a solution to a perceived problem – personal, national or global?

We look at what the Pharisees did and can we really blame them?

Giving Jesus up was the politically expedient thing to do.

He'd **asked** for it?

OK! Now we have satisfied ourselves that the ending we had guessed was true, we settle down to reading the story in between.

We will realise on **Wednesday**, as we look at our implications in Jesus' death, that this was not just a stupid move by **Jesus** but **our sin** also in moving with the comfortable politics of the day and not following his commandment to love and standing up for what our faith calls us to stand up for, that led to his death.

On **Thursday**, we enact the last meal Jesus had with his disciples.

We recognize our need to be humble and serve others no matter what the cost.

Then on **Friday**, we reach the final journey of Jesus till his death and we leave in silence to mourn.

On **Saturday** evening, and again on **Sunday** morning, we reach **the real** ending of the story.

The '**I told you so**' s fly out of the window.

We kindle the new fire,

We ring our bells.

We celebrate!

We were **wrong** after all.

We were so eager to prove we were **right** that we only looked ahead to the outcome we expected

You do a dumb thing – you deserve to live with the consequences.

We didn't read the last chapter.

We were unprepared for the surprise.

We were unprepared for the unthinkable.

The dead came to life.

Jesus rose.

He broke the odds.

This was what it was all about – a final victory – victory over death.

This was not about winning over the approval of the people or the powers that be.

It was not about winning an election.

This was about the justice of God and the triumph of love.

The triumph of the infinite love of God seen in Jesus Christ.

It is a long week we have ahead of us but I encourage you not to leap to the end of the story

I realize you already **know** the ending but like any book it is the joy of journeying with the author that makes the story real.

Let us journey with God as God shows us just how much he loves us in that he gave his only begotten son to live as one of us and died as one of us after showing us how our true God-given humanity should be lived out. Amen.