

Palm Sunday - Reflection
02/04/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Readings for the Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29 Give thanks to God, God's mercies endure forever
Matthew 21: 1-11 Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem

Readings for Sunday of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a I listen and turn to God and He will save me
Psalm 31: 9-18 Trouble is all around, but I put my trust in God
Philippians 2:5-11 Jesus gave up everything, but is exalted as Lord
Matthew 26:14 – 27:66 The Passion of Jesus

Introduction

Today is known as Palm Sunday, but it is also known as the Sunday of the Passion.

There are two main themes from today's Bible readings. The first is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and the second is the passion, where we hear how Jesus is betrayed, deserted and crucified.

So, let us today explore both of these themes, and what we might be able to learn from them, so that we might be able to incorporate the example of Jesus, into our own lives.

Palm Sunday

So, what do we see in the bible readings for the liturgy of the Palms?

Psalm 118 talks about knowing God's mercy for us. In verse 29 we hear,
"O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good: and his mercy endures for ever."

In chapter 21 of Matthew's gospel, we hear the people shout about Jesus,

'Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

The word Hosanna was not merely a word of praise to God, but it means to save, to rescue, or to call for a saviour.

So, in the readings for the Liturgy of the Palms we see how Jesus is being praised. People coming from their homes. Placing cloaks and branches on the road to make a better path for him. Shouting and invoking the name of the great king David.

Who has ever been to a big parade? Decorated floats, marching bands, people having a wonderful time. When we lived in Ayr, in North Queensland, there was a parade at the time of the local Water Festival. When I think of Palm Sunday, I envision something like the water festival parade. People everywhere and having a good time. But instead of it just being a community event, on Palm Sunday, Jesus was the focus, and everyone was coming out to worship him.

Do you get excited when you hear the name of Jesus? Do you feel like having a party? The people in today's reading did. They were excited to see Jesus.

Because of who Jesus is, there is a very good reason to get excited about knowing Jesus. Jesus said he was the way to God 2000 years ago, and Jesus is still the way to God today.

Sunday of the Passion

And now let's look at the readings from the Sunday of the Passion.

Jesus is not being celebrated, but rather rejected. They say a week is a long time in politics. There was certainly a massive turn of events from Palm Sunday to Good Friday. Jesus goes from being celebrated, by the people, to being rejected, by the people.

In chapter 27 of Matthew's gospel we hear,

²² Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!'

Jesus went from being admired by the people of Jerusalem, to being deserted, by even his closest friends.

Jesus in his humanity cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This is a very hard story to hear, but we know that Jesus chose to do it for us. Not just to be a good example, or just to show how good he was, but so that by accepting that Jesus has done this for us, we can be reconciled to God. The death of Jesus is the gateway by which we can be forgiven and brought back into a right relationship with God.

Dichotomy today

Today in our readings from the Bible we see two great extremes. Jesus is at first exalted and praised as he rides into Jerusalem, albeit on a donkey. And then we hear the passion, how Jesus is betrayed, deserted, and crucified.

Lesson from the two themes

So, what can we take away today, a day when we hear of such extremes?

Well firstly we can take away that Jesus is who he said he is. He is the prophesied Messiah. What happened to him is the fulfillment of scripture.

Secondly and probably of a more practical nature for our daily lives, is that Jesus had to handle the extremes. He dealt with the highs and lows. As we heard in today's reading from Philippians Jesus gave up everything in obedience to God and is now exalted as Lord of All.

He leaves an example for us that, no matter what happens to us in our lives we know we can rely on God.

Conclusion

We will all, no doubt, go through difficulties in our own lives. If we turn to God, if we like Jesus are prepared to submit our whole selves to him, then we know we can expect to be with him, and be comforted, by him.

As we look around the world, we can see that there are challenging times ahead, but in Jesus, we can be assured of God's presence with us.

Today we begin Holy Week, and we Journey with Jesus on his way to the Cross on Good Friday. It is a solemn time. Jesus' death is not something we should take lightly. But we do it with great anticipation. Anticipation for the Joy of Easter, and the knowledge of the Hope we have been given in the Resurrection. Amen.