

## **Matthew 21.1-11**

Recently, I have been reading (if that is the right word), “The boy, the mole, the fox and the Horse” by Charlie Mackesy. It is a beautiful illustrated, simple and yet profound story of four very different friends who journey together and learn about life along the way. “Their adventures happen in the springtime”, so writes the author, “where one moment, snow is falling and the sun shines the next, which is also a little bit like life – it can turn on a sixpence.

The world has certainly done that over the last month. Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, when we would in most churches of the Benefice parade our Palm Crosses around the church as we remember Jesus entry into Jerusalem. There is no parade this year, and it may be of some comfort to notice that palms are not mentioned specifically in our reading. This year we mark the occasion in different ways, but the message of both Palm Sunday, and Holy Week remains the same, that the works of Jesus recalled in worship are the ways in which life can be found, a message which is even more important in a time when so much of what makes up daily life has changed beyond all recognition.

Our Bible reading is the beginning of Matthew’s account of Holy Week, and Jesus comes into the city in a manner that a follower of God would recognise. The people who have known the words written by Zechariah (9.9) many years before “Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey”. Jesus, the wisdom of God comes to the holy place, a place which will in the end reject him and turns it upside-down, as Matthew records from turning over the tables of the money changers who conducted their business in the outer courtyards to teaching a different way of living; for example to “love your neighbour as yourself”. In the words of the late Michael Green, Jesus “wants to make the people ... see that though He is their righteous king, his reign is one of peace and service. In our day, while community is physically separated than has been known in our lifetimes, there are also many accounts of people coming together and loving neighbour as themselves and serving the common good.

At this unique moment in history, there is an even more important message, found in the words the crowd exclaim – “Hosanna to the Son of David”. This is more than a word used in praise of God, literally it is a cry for assistance – save us now the crowd shout out. This sounds to me very much like the kind of message our world needs to hear. On Thursday the nation stopped to clap the NHS – and it is important that as a community we never stop being thankful for all medical professionals, all carers, and all those who work in roles which keep the basic fabric of society moving. Unfortunately, the virus the nation faces has led to death for some, and to cry “Hosanna” is asking for something more profound than simply a healing in the present time. It is asking Jesus of Nazareth, God’s rescue plan, to save us in every sense of the word. The one who was born, lived and gave Himself for us promises an

assurance of hope and an assurance of life through his overcoming of death itself which is what next Sunday is all about..

That's the thing about the journey of holy week is that unlike any other human story death is not the end of it, Jesus is restored to life. The resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from the sufferings of Jesus beforehand, but without it the hope that followers of Jesus have is much reduced. The resurrection appearances reminds us that after Easter, Jesus is the same, and yet everything has changed.

In these days of doing church differently, let's try and hold onto Jesus, and our faith in these difficult and challenging days. Timothy Dudley-Smith's hymn "Lord of the church" concludes the first verse asking that the labours of Jesus' followers would bring us "nearer to what a church should be". To be without our regular places of worship changes things, perhaps you are feeling a bit lost in the wilderness, perhaps the changes which are necessary for a period are causing you to question your faith?

Faith is about more than the special places which are the buildings of the Theydon Parishes, and begins with the heart's desire to be fed with food which will last which is symbolised and finds expression in the Holy Communion we share in our Benefice week by week and are bereft of together for a season. This sign belongs to the whole people of God, and was both instituted by Jesus when the disciples gathered and continued when people came together. As there have been Christians before who have gone without Communion for a time, and did their worship differently, the same is true for us, and also for me as your Vicar. Although special dispensation has been given by the Bishop to allow for clergy to celebrate the sacrament at home, it is not my intention to celebrate the holy mysteries until the time when it is possible once again to do so with the people present.

On the steps of St Peter's square, the Pope said "*Faith begins when we realise we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we flounder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars*".

"The virus has reminded us that the things of life which appeared to be immovable can be swiftly left aside. To be a human being is not to be powerful, but to be a human is found in the fact that we need each other and often need someone to help.

Returning to "the boy, the mole, the fox and the Horse; "*What's the bravest thing you've ever said?*" asked the boy. "*Help*" said the horse". When the crowd shouted out that first Palm Sunday, that is the beginning of their cry, and through all the storms, that is where all prayer begins – simply asking God to help. So, this week, as in spirit churches around the world walk alongside Jesus in the way of the cross, may we together, wherever you may be watching ask Jesus who came to save to be helper for the world. Let us pray together "Hosanna" – "save now we pray"