

## Bennochry church: 20th March 2016

I wonder when you last cheered for someone? Ask the people round about you. Maybe it was a music concert (Bruce Davies), a sporting event, a member of your family was involved in something like a school or a youth event, a church service - Atlanta worship...when was the last time you gave the preacher a round of applause!

This is Palm Sunday, so I hope you know where I am coming from... Crowds are fickle, 'hosanna' (*save us now*) became 'crucify him' and that is from the football terracing! You start as saviour and end up as villain. In a very short space of time that is what happened to Jesus. I don't want to push the football managerial image too much, but here he gets the full backing of the chairman (people of Jerusalem) and you know what happens next.

He wasn't what they expected, he did not become their hero to cast aside the 'evil' empire of Rome, he was no Luke Skywalker, and so they turned on him. He did not leave the post of Messiah by mutual consent. He was killed! It was a strange theology. God would once again destroy the enemies of the people of Israel. That is how they got the land in the first place, so why not do it again. The violence of that theology continues to today - sadly. It was not the way of Jesus.

Do you like processions? I saw the one, by accident, of the reindeer down the High street in Kirkcaldy, to install Santa in his Grotto. You didn't miss much! It was cold, wet, but the reindeer were cute. The people of Israel loved a good procession and on the great festival days like Passover and Pentecost (In OT festival to celebrate the giving of the law at Mt Sinai) the pilgrims, in great numbers, would make their way to the Temple, the Holy place, in Jerusalem. I want you to imagine two groups; one in the court of the Temple greeting another as they arrive (probably the temple priests). Psalm 118 contains a dialogue of responses. Let's try that [words on screen] I will be the priests and you are the people arriving at the Temple to celebrate one of the great feast days.

19 *People: Open to me the gates of the Temple;  
I will go in and give thanks to the LORD!*

20 *Priests: **This is the gate of the LORD;  
only the righteous can come in.***

21 *People: I praise you, LORD, because you heard me,  
because you have given me victory.*

25 *People: Save us, LORD, save us!  
Give us success, O LORD!*

***26 Priests: May God bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD!***

***From the Temple of the LORD we bless you.***

*27 People: The LORD is God; he has been good to us.  
With branches in your hands, start the festival  
and march around the altar.*

That last verse is the link to our story today. "*With branches in your hands*". By all accounts, Jesus entry into Jerusalem was impressive. You get a sense of the crowd and the noise, the energy and the excitement.

I wonder how such an event would take place today? What would make it biblically dramatic? How would Jesus enter Edinburgh on his way up the High street to St Giles Cathedral? Let your mind run wild - yes it is the church of Scotland - let your mind run wild. What are you seeing?

This would be a huge event. All the big players would be there. Theological pundits talking for at least two hours before the event! TV, radio, Fife free press. Mobile phones capturing the scene. It is all over social media. It would 'trending' and it would have its own Facebook page and its hash tag (JC enters city). People would be laying down... (not palm branches). The people would be shouting, what would they be saying... 'go yourself, big man'. Remember, this event is a world away from our culture. Jerusalem expected God's messenger, the Messiah, to

come. It was a tinderbox of expectation. Nobody was quite sure what was going to happen.

What we do know is this, the religious authorities were fearful of this man and his army of 12 + some women. The last thing they wanted was the Roman empire to think that here was a King to challenge the emperor and they would face the repercussions. So, they decided to act and concoct a charge that would get the Romans to execute Jesus, only they had the power to do that, as a criminal. That is the reality of what happened. In a political sense it seemed to suit everyone. They were unaware, that Easter and resurrection were just around the corner.

Every Easter, we are in that crowd. What do we expect of God this Easter? What words come easily to our lips. 'God be our saviour' or if we don't actually hammer a nail into the hands of Jesus, do we just drift away? The cries of 'hosanna' becoming just an echo in the wind of what might have been.

Here is the amazing thing. Easter does not need our hosannas. That is the thing about God. Resurrection will always happen, in spite of our words of denial. God's love strong enough, to absorb even the pain and separation of Jesus death. That is the Easter story. May we have ears

to listen. Amen.