

# Reflection on Psalm Sunday

David Fotheringham,  
April 2020

## *Read: Mark 11:1-11*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+11%3A1-11&version=NRSV>

When I was in Israel, about 7 years ago, I got to see something of the geography of the place. In particular, Jericho stands out as something of an oasis in the middle of a hot, wide plain, through which Jesus passed on his way to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is then a fair way up, climbing through the rugged passes in the mountains until you get to the beautiful green areas up around Bethany, the Mount of Olives, and Jerusalem.

It wasn't only Jesus who went that way. Lots of people headed that way to go to the annual festival of the Passover. Picture, in better years, crowds of people heading for to the MCG for the Grand Final festival.

Jesus and his disciples head into Jerusalem. He has been warning us repeatedly that he's well expecting to suffer, to die, and three days later to rise again, and he evidently decides to make a bit of a show of it.

A fair bit of this passage is actually about setting up the show. Some of it is probably a bit of satire, knowing that the Roman rulers would be coming in to Jerusalem on big, decorated horses with a whole lot of pomp and ceremony.

So he sends his disciples ahead to pick up a colt – the foal of a donkey, the other gospels say. Even the picking up of the colt is a part of the theatre – telling everyone they meet – *what are you doing with this colt – the Lord needs it!* so there's going to be bunch of people along the way curious as to what this band of hooligans is planning as they make their way to the festival, like going to the MCG complete with scarves and beanies and... a colt.

The disciples really get into this. They put their cloaks on the animal, for Jesus to sit on. This is starting to point at Royalty. And then we get the leafy branches (not necessarily palms) cut and waved and spread on the road – very like 200 years before when Judas Maccabaeus rode into Jerusalem after defeating the evil Antiochus Epiphanes, setting up a Jewish royal dynasty that lasted 100 years.

And the people get into it, shouting the great welcomes of "Hosanna" and "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"; and even "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David"! To ask how much they believed that that kingdom was about to be returned may be like asking a Collingwood supporter how much they believe that Collingwood would win the GF.

Is this all a game?

Do the crowds see it as a game –  
are they cheering because this is a serious challenge to the Roman rule;  
are they cheering because this is a great satire of Roman pageantry;  
are they cheering because this is the Jesus they have longed for?

It's going to be more than a game, but at this moment there's no lack of humour and satire – a royal claimant with his feet dragging on the ground hanging over a baby animal; a revolutionary without arms or army to take on the rulers but making himself obvious on the way;  
one coming in the name of the Lord deliberately, inexorably, directly. Whatever is in the mind of the crowds, JESUS is coming in deliberately, steadfast in his purpose and love.

And then, we have the great anticlimax.

After all of that fun and commotion, he goes into the temple, looks around, and that's about it.

It's a good thing to do, of course: really see what's going on. Looking and listening is always a good thing to do first. He isn't rushing. Timing is in the hands of God.

At the moment, we are having to learn and practice a whole lot of patience, and a whole lot of courage, when there's a lot still to unfold in the community but we, as individuals, don't control the timing.

This Easter is unlike any Easter in recent memory. We have a whole lot of different things to negotiate: changes in life circumstances; different feelings and different fears; lots of demand on some people while for many it's more about dealing with solitude, frustration, cabin fever, grief, anticipatory grief, and physical separation. There's a lot to deal with.

We may discover things about our own personalities - triggers and vulnerabilities that we may not have known we had or may not have had to work through. I notice within my own household one who clings, in stress; one who focuses on work and doing stuff; and one who gets bored but just wants to do the right thing. It's important to bring what we notice before God, to check out what's going on underneath, and to reach out when we need.

On Palm Sunday, for all the pageantry and fun Jesus is riding into a serious challenge, and the disciples are preparing for a Passover unlike any they've experienced before. Jesus takes their journey seriously. Because at the end of this reading, though it seems like an anticlimax, what he actually does is go back out to Bethany with the 12. In their own isolation, in their own retreat space, he is there. He looked around at the temple, yes; but he also looks around at his disciples. And stays with them.

There's a journey ahead, but he is with us; he stays with us; he has time for us. And while all the world seems crazy, he stays: to teach us, to prepare us, to love us still.  
This is the glory of God.