

## Bennoch Church: 1st April 2012

Imagine scene...Raith Rovers win something... if you find that hard... famous person is coming to town and the people are waiting in expectation... or Olympic torch is being carried through the streets and people gather to celebrate, out of curiosity or just to say I was there! .If the famous person was Jesus, what would be the response of the people? If people were to welcome him, what would they be saying? Would anything be waved or cast on the ground in respect or praise? Or would the streets be empty except for the faithful few? I suspect there would be the curious and those there just to mock. Many would be apathetic and carry on their daily lives, in spite of tales of resurrection.

If we put together the pieces of this event, we will find a colt, Jesus entry into the city of Jerusalem and the response of the crowd. He certainly got as crowd! Plans had been made by Jesus, how far in advance, we do not know, and who was the owner of this colt and did they know its purpose?

The response of the crowd, maybe a mixture of Jesus followers and pilgrims there for the Passover festival, is recorded as totally positive. Royal homage in the laying of branches & *"Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord!"*. The words of such Psalms commonly sung at Passover. Yet it so quickly it changed to one of condemnation. "Crucify him". What is going on?

It is all about expectation, highly charged at Passover time, is this man the Messiah who will restore the Kingdom of David? So the questions going through people's minds would have been, who is he and why has he come? They should have read the signs. There was no army; only a group of followers, no war lord but prince of peace and the war horse was a humble colt. Read Zechariah 9:9. Was their expectation so great, their hopes so raised, that in spite of what they witnessed with their own eyes,

they still believed their understanding of the Messiah. Here is the one, sent by God, who will save his people. But from what or who... the Romans, that we might be a "nation again"? For them, the expectation was in the 'here and now', not some "airy fairy" future. They were looking for liberation. It has been suggested that if Jesus had entered the city recognised as Messiah, he would have been arrested on sight.

However, the hopes of the crowd were soon dashed and they began to ask how can this man be the Messiah. Crucify him! Bring in the Kingdom of God, with what? Crucify him! We are God's chosen people, we have got this wrong, humility will not win our battle, a few fishermen will never win the war and talk of love your enemies, you must be kidding! Crucify him!

Today we are in the crowd. In worship we bring our lives as palm branches, but what do we cry? What are our Easter expectations? What are our hopes and fears for what is about to unfold? What does this man on the colt want with us, and anyway, who is this Jesus? These questions are as real for us today as they were for the cheering crowds of Jerusalem.

It is easier to profess faith when things are going well, when our expectations in life and God's plan seem to be coming together. But when our hopes are not met, when life gets tough, when questions have no answers, what stops us from crying, as they did, 'crucify him'?

For the people of Jerusalem, their profession of faith was based on their expectation of who they thought Jesus was, but it is far more difficult when the man on the colt challenges us and calls us to follow him, not through the cheering crowds of Jerusalem, but through very different crowds, on our way to a cross outside the city walls, where praise has turned to jeers. *If anyone wants to follow me, forgot yourself and carry my cross.* Not just when we are part of a supportive crowd but listening,

sometimes alone, to the call of Christ through the still small voice of God. Maybe not as here, joining in the hope of vanquishing an occupying force, but standing with Jesus to love even our enemies. So no wonder the cries of praise changed to condemnation, 'crucify him'!

As we walk with Jesus this Passion Sunday, and through Holy week to Easter, we will walk with him through trial and tribulation, a fellowship meal with friends, prayers in Gethsemane, denial, death and resurrection. And we will cheer, as the crowds did, but we know why we shout his name, this is Jesus Christ, who comes in the name of the Lord. Hallelujah. Amen.