

Bennochy church: 9th April 23017

What would get you passionate enough to join others in public protest, celebration or just to stand in solidarity with others. Sometimes the closest we get is sitting in our living rooms, watching the TV and wondering what got these people out onto the streets. What motivated them. What affected their lives so much, that they left the comfort of their homes and took to the streets. There will be times when our minds tell us something is not right, in our community and maybe we should be doing something about it, but it goes no further. We hope others will take up the fight, on our behalf, against the injustice, the exploitation or the violence. But, maybe, just maybe, there will be something, driven by our heart and not just our mind, that says, we cannot leave this to others. We need to occupy the street. We need to stand in solidarity with the crowd, in spite of what others might think. The public square can be a very risky place, especially in other countries where our freedoms cannot be taken for granted.

Jerusalem was overflowing with pilgrims. It was heaving with people on the streets. You could not move. Have to tried to move up and drive the High Street, in Edinburgh, not Kirkcaldy, at the time of the Fringe? That was Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands there to celebrate the Passover. Many times the city's normal population.

The Passover was one of the greatest events in the history of Israel. It enacted the escape of the Israelites, led by Moses, out of Egypt, and in essence created them as the people of God. If there was anything that defined their identity, it was the Exodus from Egypt. Each year, crowds thronged to Jerusalem to bear witness to the hand of God in the salvation of his people. It was that important, and if you were a Jew, from any part of the Roman empire, at least once in your life, to wanted to make that pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem and take your place in its streets.

Add into the mix, the rumours circulating about Jesus and you have an atmosphere was fervent and volatile. The rumours were about the identity of Jesus and the claim of his Messiahship. Was he the long promised saviour of the people of God. The Roman authorities were uncomfortable, to say the least, about a man who claimed to be King. It challenged their rule and they believed, could lead to rebellion. He could literally be the spark that ignited opposition to their rule, bubbling away, just under the surface. For the Jewish religious leaders, his claim was blasphemous. How dare this man speak, in the name of God, and make such claims. So how much easier for both groups, if Jesus could be quickly removed and dealt with. But before that could happen, Jesus entered the city.

To counter the fears of the authorities, Jesus response is like an enacted parable. He deliberately chooses to enter Jerusalem in a manner that speaks, not of rebellion but of peace; this is not a man at the head of a mighty army, coming to lead his people in armed revolt to overthrow the Roman occupiers; this is a man, sitting on a colt. His army, a small group of unarmed followers. Jesus is saying, to your earthly rule, I offer no threat.

Often in history, claimants to the throne would invade and hope to gather an army as they travelled. People would rally to their cause. It didn't work for Charles Edward Stewart as he headed south for London in 1745. Jesus is not here seeking to gather such an army, but to his opponents, the response of the crowd, was equally dangerous.

I am not sure who was part of the large crowd of disciples. Jesus had obviously picked up some people 'en route', thanking God for all the great things they had seen. Had they witnessed a healing miracle or healed by Jesus touch themselves? Were they part of the crowd of 5000 fed by Jesus? Had they heard firsthand the *sermon on the mount*? Where they there when Lazarus was raised from the dead? Or were they just enthused by the possibility, of Jesus claim to be the Messiah of God. Maybe others just got caught up in the atmosphere of celebration. That happens. Add in your own possibilities and wonder, if Jesus entry was today, into the city of Edinburgh, or

wherever, would we be part of the crowd? Would it be enough to motivate us and get us out into the streets?

"God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!"

These were dangerous words. But taking to the streets is about offering a challenge to authority. That is what is happening here. The freedom of the public square is about speaking your voice, sharing your concerns and letting others know what is important to you. So claims of kingship reverberate around the streets of Jerusalem. To the point that some of the religious leaders tell Jesus to silence his disciples. But he says, his claim is so strong, that if the crowd fell silent, the stones themselves would start to shout.

The justice of God shouts even if it has no voice. The love of God shouts even if there is no compassion in our hearts. The peace of God is deafening, even in the midst of its rejection. But better to voice our faith, so the stones do not need to speak. This Easter, let us take to the streets, and join the crowd.

"God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!" Amen