

Sermon for Palm Sunday, 24th March

By Rev Petra Elsmore

TALK

Welcome!

One of the lovely things about owning a dog is that there's always someone who is delighted to see you come home. It doesn't matter if you've only been out for half an hour, Oscar, our not so small puppy goes crazy to see us when we come in. He jumps up and down and wags his tail so hard, the wag seems to involve his whole body.

One of the things about having family both here and in Prague is that I tend to do quite a lot of travelling.

I always look forward to seeing friendly faces when I come through the arrivals gate.

It's one of life's lovely excitements to be the person waiting at the gate to welcome a loved one or a friend home from their flight.

Something special happens when people are reunited.

Question: What was the most exciting Welcome that someone prepared for you or you have prepared for someone you love?

The Scripture:

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, 'Hosanna!'

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

10

'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!'

'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

(Mark 11:8-10)

Welcoming Jesus

The Bible has lots of moments and scenes of welcome.

Most of them are very domestic, the kind of welcome that we thought about when we thought about the arrivals lounge at the airport.

Elizabeth welcomes Mary,

Abraham welcomes three weary travellers.

A woman welcomes Jesus into the house of Simon the Pharisee, ready to use an expensive perfume after washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair.

The welcome of Jesus into Jerusalem is on a different scale.

It's more like the welcome a famous pop group receives when they come into town to make a public appearance, or the welcome a crowd gives to a popular political leader.

There's standing room only.. There's pushing and shoving.. The crowd are chanting and shouting in their excitement.

Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,"

They welcomed him as a King.

The king who would bring peace and justice,
The King who would deal with the Romans,
The king who would restore the land to a once proud people.

No wonder they welcomed him by throwing their coats on the ground and waving palm branches.

They for that moment were filled with hope for the future.

Welcoming God

Palm Sunday reminds me that there are special moments when God comes very close to us. Moments when we feel God's presence with us. Moments when we experience Hope in the midst of a difficult situation. Moments of clear understanding when the mystery of life is made plain to us. Moments of trust when we know, despite our doubts that Jesus is The Way.

The excitement of a welcome at the airport can fade quickly and we can find ourselves arguing about the best way home on the drive back from the airport.

We know that the excitement of the crowds in Jerusalem didn't last and that a few days after they cried Hosanna and welcomed Jesus as King, the crowds were calling for him to be crucified.

However fleeting. It is good to hold on to the special moments - these are the moments of wonder when we see the world and reality as it truly is. Just as the excitement of the welcome home tells us the truth about our love for the person we welcome, rather than the argument about the best way home, so the moment of clarity about or faith is the truth we need to keep returning to, rather than the moment of doubt which followed.

We speak of glimpses of glory. Glimpses are just that, glimpses they don't last long and we can't hold on to them, but yet they can stay imprinted on our hearts and minds. And that's something that is important to remember....

In our lives we have the moments of connection in our relationships, the moments of clarity, when we see deeper purpose behind our work, the activities we get involved with. Those moments of clarity and connection don't last forever but they are significant enough to help us stay on the course, they help us to enjoy our friendships and relationships when life gets tough.

With our relationship with God it is similar, we experience those moments of clarity, when in our hearts we know deeply what God is about, what he wants from us...

I pray that in this Holy Week and in the coming Easter, we would each find our own moment of clarity and blessing and so be able to welcome Jesus afresh into our hearts and lives.

Amen.

Poem

Palm Sunday

by Malcolm Guite

Now to the gate of my Jerusalem,
The seething holy city of my heart,
The saviour comes. But will I welcome him?
Oh crowds of easy feelings make a start;
They raise their hands, get caught up in the singing,
And think the battle won. Too soon they'll find
The challenge, the reversal he is bringing
Changes their tune. I know what lies behind
The surface flourish that so quickly fades;
Self-interest, and fearful guardedness,
The hardness of the heart, its barricades,
And at the core, the dreadful emptiness
Of a perverted temple. Jesus come
Break my resistance and make me your home.

