



Palm Sunday, 11am Choral Eucharist 2021

Hosanna to the Son of David! We cry, Hosanna! which actually means ‘save us!’, ‘rescue us!’. *Rescue* us! Successor to David’s throne. The cry of the crowds as Jesus enters Jerusalem is tinged with nostalgia. Save us from *now*, and take us back to the good old days of King David.

I immediately think of the words of the Risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene when she recognises that He isn’t the gardener. *Noli me tangere* – touch me not. [Some of you may know the stunning Graham Sutherland painting of this moment in Chichester Cathedral. It’s called *Noli Me Tangere* (meaning ‘touch me not’) and so is affectionately known as ‘hands off my tangerines’. Anyway, I digress.] Jesus says ‘touch me not’, not because He is rejecting her, but because her relief at seeing Him is because she thinks it can all go *back*, to how it *was*. No, says

Jesus, not back but forward. So, for the Palm Sunday crowds, things will never be the same again. Nostalgia is a very tempting red herring. We can hark back to better days before Covid, or better days of culture or language, education, public life, Christendom's so-called glory days. Whatever we find ourselves harking back to (as lovely and important as *memories* are), as Christians ours is never to go back, but forward.

Mary can't go back to how things were before the Crucifixion; and thank goodness, because the Resurrection life is what lies ahead. The Palm Sunday crowds can't go back to having their own King like David: thank goodness, because Jesus' Kingship isn't that of petulant local dictator, He is the King of life and love. But we can't see it at the time, we just want to go back.

I once went on a retreat led by an old priest just about to retire, and he wasn't happy. He didn't want to retire. His whole self was wrapped up in being a priest, and in his parish. He had hoped to die in the chair, but now, scared and sad he looked upon retirement. It made it all the more

powerful when in the last address he said that the Bible passage that has meant more to him than any other is Hebrews 13.8 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.' Jesus was and is and is to come. It's said in the stone of our church too, in front of me on the balustrade (alpha and omega, Jesus the first and the last). And this old priest's point was that whatever happens, wherever we are as people and church and communities Jesus is ahead of us, coming to meet us. He is already there, waiting for us. Do not cry 'rescue us' to earthly thrones, or nostalgic fantasies, or anything else. They can never save. Jesus was, and is now, and is coming to meet us – *whatever* lies ahead.

And as ever with our Faith, there are *layers* of Jesus being with us.

Jesus is coming to meet us on the great stage of history - the end of days.

Jesus comes to us in our lives – in the love and service of the human family and the church, in our relationships and joys, in beauty and creativity.

Jesus comes to us in our Spiritual lives – in prayer and the Scriptures, in our friendship with God, and in a few moments in the source and summit of our faith lives: Holy Communion.

And in the week ahead. This is Holy Week, the heart of the Christian year. We are invited to live it wholeheartedly. Please don't just turn up next Sunday at 11am thinking you've done Easter. The quiet Masses of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and the great liturgies of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday are essential. This may be your 1st or you 71st Holy Week, it doesn't matter. If we journey whole-heartedly with Christ He will come to meet us. He will surprise and change us. Just as He has always done, just as He did for the Palm Sunday crowds, just as He did for St Mary Magdalene and everyone between them and us. Whatever we think we are and want, He will show us things, greater and more real.

Today's Palm Gospel ends in St Mark's typically spare style: 'he left with the 12 for Bethany'. So, let us go with Him.