

Jeff's reflection – Palm Sunday

What's he up to this time? What's she up to this time?

It's like watching a magician waving a cloth in the air,
or watching a Crafter laying out string, beads, coloured paper and glue,
or watching a curling skip lining up the angles for a shot,
or watching a musician excitedly scribbling notes...

What's she up to this time? What's he up to this time?

What's Jesus up to this time?

As he and his companions move towards Jerusalem, towards the Passover celebration...

What is Jesus up to, entering Jerusalem, in this time of the Roman empire? What is Jesus up to as he gives instructions to his companions?

Jesus says there is a village a little way down the road. He tells two of his disciples to go ahead of the rest, to go to the village. He says that as they enter the village they will see a mule tied near a door. They are to bring the mule to Jesus. If anyone asks what they are doing, they are to answer with what seems to be a pre-arranged response:

Tell them, "The Lord needs it and will send it back immediately."

Sitting on this mule, Jesus will now process into Jerusalem – his procession will be one of two processions into the city for the festival.

Pilate, the governor of Judea, would come to Jerusalem from his residence west of the city. The governor would come to be present for the Passover festival, a time when the city was swelled with pilgrims, when the city that had a usual population of 50,000 people might now be host to 200,000!

Pilate would not just wander into the city. Pilate put on a show – a show of power, authority, pomp and circumstance. Pilate would come riding into the city, likely on a stallion, accompanied by cavalry, a parade of foot soldiers, some carrying the gold standards bearing the golden eagle, emblem of the Roman empire. It was a statement and a declaration to everyone – the story you inhabit is the story of Rome's imperial power. You belong to Rome, and I, Pilate, come as Rome's representative.

Jesus planned to enter the city in a different kind of procession, representing a different story. Pilate entered from the west. Jesus entered from the east.

Two different parades – two different stories.

We know what Pilate was up to – a show of force, of power, reminding everyone who was in charge, reminding everyone that no matter how passionate they might be about

their Passover memory – a memory of ancestors being led out of Egypt, of being freed from their status as slave labour; a memory of wilderness wandering and struggle and manna and quail and water from rocks and commandments engraved on stone tablets; a memory of a land that was promised, a land of promise, a land that they made their land...- no matter how precious that memory, Pilate's parade told the 'now' story, that this was the land of the Roman Empire, and no God was going to free them this time.

Jesus entered on a donkey and told a different story. Jesus told God's story. We are told that as he rode into Jerusalem, people shouted 'Hosanna!' – a word that means 'save us'.

Jesus tells a story of God who saves – God who still responds to the pain, the fear, the anxieties of people.

Jesus tells a story of God who does not arrive in our midst with a show of power, of force, who does not arrive to be our master.

Jesus tells the story of one who comes to save – not slaves, but friends.

Jesus tells a story that is as surprising and difficult to believe now as it was then.

Jesus enters the city riding on a mule - *knowing that Pilate and the power of the Roman Empire are also entering the city* -to tell the story of God.

This Palm Sunday parade declares that God is in this world, God is active agent in the world, everything exists in God, everything is somehow an expression of God, a part of God. God is being and doing. Jesus enters the city on a mule to say that despite all appearances, despite the Roman Empire, despite all the violence, all the brokenness, all that seems to be NOT GOD – this **is** God's world, God is bringing to birth love and hope and kindness, and there will always be one who comes on a mule, comes in peace, comes to invite us into life in God.

This Palm Sunday declares that God is in the world and that the world is in God...and this parade tells us something of the how of God being in the world.

The how of the one who comes on a mule, the one who, wherever he goes, is welcomed by those who limp, who shuffle, who cannot see, cannot speak, cannot make a living; welcomed by those who have no status in the economic and political structures of their society, welcomed by those who seem to be the losers, the lost, the desperate.

Jesus' parade, compared to Pilate's parade, looks weak, underfunded, thrown together at the last minute, as unimpressive as it could be...

And yet...and yet...Jesus lives in the biblical '**and yet**'...in that Godly place where, despite all appearances, against all the odds, is the place where God so profoundly dwells – in the places and in the people in which all seems lost...God is found.

And this Palm parade of Jesus - leading us into a Holy Week of a shared meal, a friend's betrayal, an arrest, torture, and execution...and a tomb, and a Saturday of numbing grief, and a Sunday morning that arrives at God's 'and yet...'

this Palm parade tells us that faith is trust in God's 'and yet';

That hope is not a belief that life will give us what we want, but a deep trust that nothing in life will ever remove us from God's love;

That in a world with so many Good Friday places and experiences, this is God's '**and yet**' world...and yet, this is an Easter world, and yet we are an Easter people, and yet this is a resurrection world...and yet this **is** God's world.

Jesus comes as the one sent by God, to invite us into the story of this surprising, resurrecting, 'and yet' God; to invite us to ask "What's God up to this time?"

Blessed be the one who comes from God, the one who comes embodying God's story. Blessed be the one who proclaims the 'and yet' of God. Thanks be to God. AMEN

(NOTE: The idea of the contrast between Jesus' and Pilate's entries into Jerusalem is based on descriptions in the book The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus' Last Days in Jerusalem by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan)

For reflection:

What surprises, challenges or inspires you as you read about the differences between the ways Jesus and Pilate entered Jerusalem?

What do you think about the idea of God being an 'and yet' God?

Where do you experience a sense of 'and yet' hope in your life or in the world?