

TFTD L26: Monday of Holy Week

Looking down the steep slope of the Mount of Olives, a small donkey waits with his owner ...



AS we enter Holy Week, our Palm Sunday reflection comes from Robin.

It's nearly the end of Lent!

All that fasting we've been doing: it's almost over!

I say all that fasting, but Lent is a funny business isn't it? Have we been fasting?

We start off on Ash Wednesday and it's all pretty serious. We are thinking about all our sins and about how much we need God's forgiveness.

But then we get to St Patrick's day and people go "Hurray for St Patrick!" let's have a party where we all wear green clothes and drink Guinness!

And then we get to Mothering Sunday and we say "Hurray for mothers!" let's all go out for lunch (to give Mum a break). And let's buy her flowers and chocolates. (She might share the chocolates with us!)

And now we have got as far as Palm Sunday. And we say “Hurray for Jesus!” and we remember how Jesus entered into Jerusalem and how happy people were that Jesus had come to the capital city to proclaim his Kingdom.

Jesus had been going round the countryside. He just had to touch a sick person and no matter what their illness was: boom! They are cured!

And he has told us so many wonderful stories about how the Kingdom of God is going to be. And here he is in Jerusalem itself! The very centre of power! This is where God lives! And now Jesus is finally here! Hold your hats! Here comes the Kingdom of God!

And what a wonderful Kingdom it is! It’s a kingdom where every little bit of love inside us grows and grows like a mustard seed grows into a tree large enough for birds to nest in its branches. No more people being nasty to each other! Enough love for everybody!

It’s a Kingdom where everybody gets everything they need like a workman who only works for an hour but gets paid for a whole day. No more people starving because there isn’t enough to go round!

It’s a Kingdom where people love their neighbour as much as they love themselves; even people from other countries, like Samaritans! No more war! Only peace!

It’s a Kingdom of love and peace and justice where every tear is wiped from every eye and there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain because the old order of things has passed away!

So let’s wave our palms high in the air and celebrate!

But when our cheers and our hosannas die away, we are still in Lent. We still have Good Friday to come.

And when Good Friday comes we will have to remember how Jesus was put to death and how all the dreams the people had of a new kingdom of God died with him. How the people who followed him into Jerusalem cheering him and waving their palms melted away in fear and confusion.

Jesus is the Son of God but he came to us in human likeness. In human form he came to Jerusalem and proclaimed the Kingdom of God and the rulers of the city had him put to death and his followers melted away. The old order of things did not pass away. The old order of things very much stayed put.

Because that’s what happens isn’t it when we have crazy dreams about how things should be and how everything could be different. The people in charge know how to put a stop to all this nonsense and deal with the troublemakers.

It seems like an story repeating itself. In human form Jesus humbled himself and is obedient to the point of death, death on a cross, the fate that awaited all rebellious slaves.

But then something amazing happened. Jesus died and then rose again from the dead. And entered into heaven where he sits at God's right hand. He was given the name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee may bend and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

As the Son of Man, Jesus came to Jerusalem, proclaimed the Kingdom and was put to death. But then, having been put to death, as the Son of God, he defeats death and rises to new life.

Where does this leave us and our dreams of a Kingdom of peace and justice and love?

Once Jesus was asked when the Kingdom of God was coming and he answered, *'the Kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For in fact the kingdom of God is among you.'* (Luke 17: 20-21)

So does this mean that God has put his Holy Spirit inside us so that his Spirit builds the Kingdom through us? Well, partly, yes. But we make a fundamental mistake if we think that it all boils down to people building a better world together, although that is part of it.

The people who followed Jesus into Jerusalem assumed that the Kingdom would have Jerusalem as its capital city and Jesus would rule as a king in the same way that kings like King David did. But the letter to the Hebrews says this: *'Here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.'* (Hebrews 13:14)

So even when our efforts to build the kingdom ourselves with God's Holy Spirit working through us fail, even then we still look for the new Jerusalem, the Kingdom that is to come through the power and love of God.

That's what Palm Sunday followed by Good Friday followed by Easter Day teaches us about the kingdom. The kingdom lives and we will see it, even though our attempts to build it ourselves seem always to end in defeat.

It's a Kingdom of love and peace and justice where every tear is wiped from every eye and there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain because the old order of things has passed away!

Hosanna to the King! And thanks be to God!