

## “GOING AGAINST EXPECTATIONS”

*Luke 19:28-44*

Well, as we all know by now, this is the day when we remember Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem amidst the shouting and cheering crowds on what we now call Palm Sunday. It was getting close to the time for the Passover celebrations so there would have been many extra people in the city, quite a number of them with nothing much to do as they waited for the beginning of the festival which was at the very heart of their religious and national life.

There would probably have been an air of carnival about the city already and many people would have been celebrating family reunions with relatives from outside the city. Unfortunately, the celebrations would be tarnished to a certain extent by the presence of the Roman occupying army, who, whilst they tried hard to allow the Jewish people to get on with their feasting and rejoicing, nevertheless lent an oppressive air to the proceedings, especially as a festival with such nationalistic overtones was bound to be seen as a threat by the occupying forces.

And into this festive and highly charged atmosphere comes Jesus. He has now made quite a name for himself by his teaching, his miracles, his debates and arguments with the authorities. Word was circulating that he was claimed by many to be the Messiah, and he had even acknowledged that claim himself. The Messiah was the one whom the people thought would free them from the oppression of Rome and the corruption of many of their local officials. These people, looking for a person to lead them in rebellion against the Romans, their emotions high on the nationalistic fervour of the Passover week, naturally turned out to cheer. It was at Passover that the people expected their long-awaited Messiah to appear – and they’d been expecting that for many a long year.

Back at the beginning of the 1980s Tottenham Hotspur was an even more successful football club than it is now – the days of Hoddle, Ardiles and Villa (*“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive!”*). When they won the FA Cup, there was a triumphal procession from Edmonton Town Hall (now, sadly, demolished), just around the corner from where we lived, down to Tottenham Town Hall. The streets were lined with flag-waving supporters; the flat roofs above the shops and the balconies of the blocks of flats were crammed with cheering fans; Arsenal supporters were cowering behind their sofas. There was a great sense of elation that the eyes of the nation were fixed on our little corner of London, that these great sporting heroes (most of whom are now forgotten or disgraced) had brought some pride to a poor locality reeling at that time from the effects of some pretty draconian government policies and simmering racial tensions. How much greater must have been the joy of the citizens of Jerusalem as they included in their adulation an element of worship, too. They sang lines from the Psalms and waved their palm fronds. They shouted out their praises to Jesus and to God.

And you can imagine Jesus’ disciples getting caught up in it all, too. They revelled in the enthusiasm and the fervour as they walked proudly along beside the donkey. “We’re his friends. We’ve talked with him, travelled with him, eaten with him, helped him in his mission. We’re almost as famous as he is.” And you’d think that Jesus would be loving it all too, wouldn’t you? If any of you have been in a situation where you’ve been the centre of attention and celebration, you’ll know how it can feel. All the noise, all the cheering, all those waving hands and branches!

But what does Luke tell us was his reaction? *“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it”* (v41). He was actually crying over the city, over the state of these people! Why? What was the reason for this extraordinary show of emotion? Why was he going against the expectations of so many people? They weren’t tears of joy, like you see some daffy Oscar winner shed, or someone meeting a long-lost relative. Jesus was crying because these people had no idea what would bring them peace. They had misunderstood Jesus and his message, and were going to end up with nothing at all in which to place their confidence. They had pinned their hopes on a political and military leader, someone who would lead them against the Romans to bring a temporary release from oppression, but their eyes were not on the things that would bring them eternal and lasting peace in their souls. In fact, it wasn’t going to be too long before the

city of Jerusalem would be put to the torch and its citizens to the sword – even the Temple would be razed to the ground. There was plenty for Jesus to weep about.

And I believe Jesus still weeps today when he looks out over our world, because so many people are pinning their hopes for peace of mind, their aspirations for freedom from worry and anxiety, on the wrong things. We've all been singing songs this morning in praise of Jesus. We enjoy the music and the atmosphere of worship, even if we are all still very much at a distance from each other. We like to think that we're really praising him – it's all good, clean fun. But do we **really** know what we're doing? Do you **really** know what will bring you lasting peace? Singing songs, saying prayers, listening to the preacher can't do that on their own. What happens when the music stops, when the service is over? If you think that alone can bring you peace, then Jesus is weeping over you,

There are those who try to find their peace and security in possessions – if they've got enough property, enough money, enough to hand on to their children, a nice house, plenty of gadgets, something just that bit bigger and more expensive than their friends and neighbours, they think they'll be OK. That's certainly what the advertisers try to make us believe, the pundits and the style gurus, the "right to own" and "shop till you drop" brigades. But, as Jesus himself made clear in the "Sermon on the Mount", in *Matthew 6:19*, where's the security in things that can get stolen, burned or smashed? "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.*" Where's the peace of mind to be had in insurance schemes and investments that can very clearly go down as well as up (and a long way down, as we've seen in recent years), or be pilfered and embezzled by directors and accountants? If that's what you think will give you peace, then Jesus is weeping over you.

Others may seek their peace and security in experiences, in relationships, even in religious experiences. But where's the security in that? Experiences change – the food and drink end up taking over, the pills need to be increased, your supposed best friends can let you down. As The Verve sang (in a quite different context), "*The drugs don't work*". Why? Because it's all based on human ideas and human beings are remarkably fickle. After all, the same crowd that were cheering for Jesus on Palm Sunday were baying for his blood less than a week later. If you think you can find your peace in human experience and relationships alone, then Jesus is weeping over you.

Perhaps you just want to go it alone, sort out your own philosophy of life, rely on yourself to get things done. If you can't trust anyone or anything else, you can always rely on yourself. Not so, says the Bible. In *Jeremiah 17:9* we read that we cannot even trust our own heart, our own mind and feelings – "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*" And selfishness will never ultimately be satisfying, as the last few decades have proved so emphatically. If you are relying on yourself to find peace, then Jesus is weeping over you.

So where **can** we find real peace? What's the answer? What did Jesus mean when he said, "*If only you had known what would bring you peace?*" (v42). In Paul's *Letter to the Romans, chapter 5*, and in the first couple of lines of that chapter, we read, "*We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*" Fine – but what does it mean?

Well, the root of our lack of peace is that our relationship with God, the Creator and Judge of all people, has been distorted by sin. The Bible is very clear that that is true of all of us. St Augustine, in words that are repeated in an Anglican collect, summed it up when he wrote, "*Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.*" We are all, alas! sinners, and deep down in ourselves, in the depths of our subconscious, we know that we've got to face the consequences of that, consequences that the Bible tells us involve judgement. You know, don't you, that if you've done something wrong and you are going to have to face some kind of sanction for it, you feel very uneasy. Remember standing outside the head teacher's door? (Or, if you have been a head teacher, remember the Ofsted inspector standing outside your door?!) That's true at a fundamental level of our human existence. Our subconscious (or whatever you want to call it) is warning us that we will one day have to face our Creator.

So how does Jesus fit in? “*We have peace with our God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” The peace comes from the fact that, when Jesus died, he took on himself all the consequences of our sins. He didn’t come to earth, as the people of Jerusalem thought, as a political figurehead or a military leader or simply as a great teacher – that would still have meant that we had to participate: Jesus would just have shown us what to do, been a good example. Jesus came into our world – God came into our world on our behalf – to deal with powers of evil, to save us from the consequences and the influence of our sin.

And what is so simple is that all we need to do is to accept that – as Paul writes there in *Romans* – “*we gain access by faith*” – and we can have peace. Yes, we need to acknowledge our sin and pledge to turn away from it, we need to accept that we cannot find peace on our own and believe that Jesus has taken on himself the punishment for it all. It’s only a small initial step, but it can change your life completely and bring you that sense of peace that Jesus could see was missing from the residents of Jerusalem.

But if you feel you cannot take that step today, if even that is too much for you, if you cannot bring yourself to accept that, then Jesus weeps for you today. He weeps because he loves you, because you matter to him and he does not want to see you passing up the opportunity to know the peace and security that God originally intended all men and women to have.

If you do feel that you want to find out more, then please get in touch with us using the contact details on the screen at the end of this service, or think about joining one of our Alpha courses to find out more about Jesus and the peace he has to offer. Never let it be said that “*you did not recognise the time of God’s coming to you.*”

### **For reflection and discussion**

- 1) This is a very familiar story for most of us. Do you have any new insights to share, having read it once again this year?
- 2) What do you understand by “peace” in this context?
- 3) Why is Jesus so concerned that the people do not know peace?
- 4) What brings you peace? How can you share that with others?
- 5) We are at the beginning of Holy Week. How will you prepare for Good Friday and Easter? How can we share with others what Easter is all about?