

*Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

*Palm Sunday A*

*Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2023*

*Who is this?*

Who is this?

It is the question for Palm Sunday, the Sunday of the passion and for Holy Week.

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, the king coming to them, greeted by the crowds with hosannas.

They see him enter and the whole city is in turmoil asking the question who is this?

His entry creates turmoil, literally the whole city shakes like an earthquake.

Something momentous is at hand, Jesus has come into their midst and the city seethes and lives are shaken.

Who is this who since before his birth has beckoned stars and wise astronomers?

From his beginning King Herod and Jerusalem were shaken when the wise men ask their question: 'where is the baby born king of the Jews?'

The question resonates in our hearts as we begin this week and go from Palms to Passion from Hosannas to upheavals and find our foundations shaken.

We hear anew the journey of Jesus to his death.

We hear again the story of betrayal and desertion, of mocking and taunting, of his innocence, condemned with the washing of hands and the taunts of the crowds.

It is a heavy story as all stories of heartache are.

This is a story where we are faced with the fickleness of humanity and our ability to be caught up in fear and blame.

Like them we can be shaken to our core by forces around us that exhaust us into submission.

Amid the turmoil Jesus keeps going, faithful to God, loving to the end.

He struggles with himself for courage to continue this journey even as his closest friends fall asleep.

Still, he says your will be done in the face of betrayal and denial, to death on a cross until his last breath.

The journey continues as he is resolute, emptying out, obedient to God's call of him in humbleness, in love.

The choice was there to fight fire with fire, violence with violence, betrayal with derision.

Instead he addresses Judas as friend, goes to his death submitting to what is to come.

My God My God he cries as he breathes his last.

And the earth shook, the rocks split, the curtain is torn.

Truly this man was God's son says the centurion.

This is a story that shakes us to our cores, and cracks open our hearts, moves us to our depths.

Who is this? is the question for each of us to ponder.

Who is Jesus for you, for me?

In our turmoil when the earth shakes beneath us and we are in terror where do we find Jesus? In the depths.

Who is this Jesus who goes determinedly to his death and beyond, arms outstretched in love for love's sake.

Here is one who dies for us, whose death heals and offers a new beginning.

Jesus' death rips the pretence of a block between us and God.

The curtain dividing the holy and the human is ripped and torn apart - God is with us even unto death and beyond, loving us in all our fickleness, moving us to our depths.

This holy week calls us to face ourselves and to hear the voice of God within us, the call of love, the call of heartache.

Even amid turmoil God's love is found, and within the promise of a new beginning.

This holy week invites us to journey with Jesus to open our hearts to ask the question:

Who is this Jesus for me, for you, for our community and city?

Who is Jesus for us in times of difficulty and joy, struggle and hope, in the midst of the stuff of life?

Who is this God who wishes to make a home in us and calls us to new beginnings and new hope even in turmoil.

Here is a God who keeps on loving us, walking with us calling us to new life and hope.

Who is this?

*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.*

*Malcolm Guite*

*Lectios:*

*Matthew 21.1-11*

*Isaiah 50.4-9a*

*Psalms 31.9-18*

*Philippians 2.5-11*

*Matthew 26.14-27.66*