

All Saints Alive

TEAM VICAR'S VIEWPOINT



Palm Sunday Procession

Palm Sunday in the Parish of Bengoe begins with a procession. It's nothing grand. No flags, banners or brass bands – just little old us, carrying palms and singing hymns along the road from the church hall and round the corner into church. We must cut a rather curious sight – a fully robed choir followed by clergy in long gowns and a group of churchgoers, pausing ceremonially at the traffic crossing outside the White Lion Pub, waiting for the 'little green man' and permission to cross the road.

The first Palm Sunday was also an extraordinary day. It was marked not just by one procession, but by two. Both ended at the temple and its economic and social power base – the market place in the temple precincts.

The first procession in Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday morning symbolized the Roman culture of Jesus' day and the second procession proclaimed Jesus' upside down kingdom.

In AD30, Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor assigned to Judea and Jerusalem. It had become the custom of the governors to live outside Jerusalem, but it was also their custom to come with their soldiers to Jerusalem for Passover. To provide a very visible and powerful Roman military presence amongst the Jews at that volatile time was a shrewd tactic – there had already been popular uprisings and many crucifixions afterward.

His procession would have come from the west at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers – an impressive and lavish procession of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armour, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted

on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold.

On the other side of the city, down from the Mount of Olives in the north came Jesus and his humble procession – no pomp, no ceremony, in the simple dress of an ordinary wandering teacher, riding on the back of a donkey and followed by his disciples drawn from amongst the peasants and the common people.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem and his followers acknowledged him as Lord and Messiah, this was a statement not only about his religious identity, but his political beliefs too. Jesus' belief in a liberating, inclusive, non-violent, peace-seeking kingdom of God was set over and against the oppressive, greedy, elite-loving, peasant-starving kingdom of Rome. For Jesus the centre of economic power is precisely the place to announce his Messiahship and the advent of God's kingdom of wholeness and abundance.

When Palm Sunday comes round each year I'm struck by themes common to Jesus' day and our own. Easter eggs have been on sale since just after Christmas this year; the seasonal scrap for retail profit so often eclipses religious values. And yet, it's the market-place of Jesus' time that forms the stage for the Easter story to be played out. Teeming with life, vendors clamouring for attention, goods and wares thrust before us for our inspection. The Romans are well aware that this is the place to stake a claim for power, to command the allegiance of the crowd, the loyalty of their leaders, and the freedom of their lives. Whoever rules wins.

Into this scene rides Jesus, followed by that ragamuffin disciple band. He does not teach. He does not preach. He does not heal. He does not confront or challenge. He does not

even speak; neither does he cross the path of anyone who requires his attention. He stands holding out to us the priceless gift of himself – his life – there for us to do what we would do with it.

What value do we give to Jesus, who stands in the market-place? There are those who discount him as nothing. Sold for 30 pieces of silver and arrested by the authorities, there are still others who consider him a threat. Disowned and abandoned by his followers, there are those who find his service a price too high to pay. And there are those who stand alongside him, ready to share his life's endeavour – and its expense.

Palm Sunday will find us processing to church – to the temple. Our procession doesn't clank past with authority as did the Romans. Few of our number harbour revolutionary political beliefs. But we are a group of people who are ready to find God – in church, in the market-place, in sacred spaces and ordinary places, in our routine business and our daily encounters. We go joyfully and expectantly on our way.

This Easter I pray that you'll find God there for you – wherever you are going, and however hard you look.

With Christian love and prayers,

Robert Thompson
Team Vicar, Holy Trinity, Bengoe

A Welcoming Space

Last year, with congregations growing, particularly at the Family Service, and with our desire to be a truly welcoming church, we realised that we needed more room at the back of church to meet and greet one another comfortably. How often we have to push round one another to enter or leave the building. It is felt too, that a change would be in harmony with the glorious air of spaciousness in the rest of the Church.

We would also have room to meet and socialise, to have coffee and refreshments together and other occasions ranging from concerts to marriages and funerals, and for

prominent services such as Christmas, Remembrance and United Services.

The Process

It was agreed at our November 2010 PCC that, after consultation with the wider congregation, we would remove the centre 3 nave pews at the back on either side on a temporary basis for 6 months. We had chosen this because we felt that this would mean the least structural damage and the least cost.

The PCC were unanimous in their approval of this and we also wrote about it in our magazine Saints Alive.

Although I had received letters and emails approving of the idea I felt that we needed to ensure that everyone had understood the idea. It has been very useful to hear your ideas and many of you would like a more radical proposal! It seems that one of the more popular ideas is that we remove one back pew on either side of the nave and rather more side aisle pews, possibly five on either side, or all from the choir rehearsal and meeting room side. However, these ideas would be considerably more expensive as the wooden side panels would have to be filled in. Removing central pews would be the most welcoming.

It has become clear that some concerns remain among members of our congregation, so we will not apply for the necessary faculty until later in 2011. This will give time for reflection on how appropriate changes could best enhance our meeting and welcoming, and offer a more useable area for vital church activities. We will arrange an open PCC meeting in late June/early July to reach agreement.

Love Jo

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