



THE NEW SHOFAR

If, just as we are, we would lay ourselves on the altar of service of Jesus Christ, there is no saying what Christ could do with us and through us.

Palm Sunday

Trust in the Lord - especially when we wonder what he is doing!

Those hearing the message of the prophet: *Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'* must have had their doubts about the sanity of Zechariah. The people had only just returned from a long, crushing exile in Babylon and the Jerusalem to which they had returned was worse than chaotic. It was a hostile, depressing wasteland. How they must have longed for the lifestyle they had in Babylon. They might have been slaves but at least they had shelter and food and a modicum of peace.

But the prophet's name said it all: *Yahweh has remembered*. The name is important because it does not mean *Yahweh will remember*. It is *has remembered* in the sense that God had never forgotten his people, had never abandoned them to the mercy of their earthly enemies. God is always remembering them, always keeping them in the divine heart and mind.

The Lord's promise to love us unconditionally, to never leave or forsake us, and to do what we cannot do for ourselves, gives us a firm foundation on which we can stand. He provides the encouragement and strength to turn our weakness into strength. The message of Palm Sunday points to a Saviour who is willing and able to save us from any catastrophe, who at the very darkest of moments, is already bringing that salvation about. And, in the midst of all of those things, he shows us how to best conduct ourselves when emotions run high.

Thus, we can sum up the message of Palm Sunday as being one of promise and absolute faith. It stresses the importance of believing God, even when, or especially when we are unable to comprehend or experience the final results. Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was foretold long before it happened. This fact alone reminds us of how God has history very much under his divine plan. Whatever of the plans and ambitions of powerful men (Babylon's king), what God wills is going to eventuate.

Why did they crucify the Psalm Sunday Jesus?

Luke tells us that as Jesus entered Jerusalem the people began rejoicing and praising God, shouting,

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!

Some Pharisees try to pressure Jesus into making the crowd stop. They ask him to rebuke the people for what they're saying — the whole "Blessed is the King" bit. The Pharisees can see what the crowd cannot see. This is no ordinary phrase and the response of the people is one meant for the Messiah.

It's a phrase found in the Hebrew Scriptures, going back to **Psalm 118**, a psalm that rejoices in the Lord's triumph. In this psalm, the rejected stone has become the "cornerstone". This is a *marvellous work* — one initiated and brought into reality by God. It is this divine activity that launches the day of salvation. This day of salvation is the long-anticipated deliverance for which Israel had been hoping. Its delay in arrival, however, made them wonder if God was even working on the fulfilling of that promise. Palm Sunday is a celebration of the enduring power of hope.

Salvation comes in a deeply personal, unambiguously human package

This salvation is nothing generic. God had promised that it would come through a person — the Messiah of God — the one sent to rescue his people. So goes the shout, in the psalm...*Blessed is **he** who comes in the name of Yahweh!* Without doubt, this rambling crowd in Jerusalem, remembering Psalm 118, is declaring Jesus to be the Messiah. But the threatened Pharisees tell Jesus to stop the madness. *Do you hear what they are saying? They think you're the Messiah come to save us. Tell them to shut up.* The things of salvation were not going their way.

What the People Saw

As is evident from the Gospels, the real problem was the way God was going about `inaugurating this new era, was bringing salvation to all peoples.

The people *wanted* salvation, desperately pleaded for God to act but their idea of what that meant was not quite in sync with what God was doing. They wanted the Messiah to march into the city and do hard business with Rome. They wanted to be free from Gentile oppression, even if by force, even if by threats and plagues and a split sea. The events of the Exodus were what they wanted and they wanted Jesus to make that happen.

What they were demanding was another exodus, one that expelled the Romans. *Herein is the power of Palm Sunday*: What they were given instead was Good Friday morning. They were sent no warrior king but a bloodied has-been, a man in Roman custody, rejected by their own leaders, standing next to an infamous criminal called Barabbas. They wanted an all-conquering king, but all they ended up seeing was a beaten blasphemer.

Palm Sunday is not all about the palm branches

Matthew tells us that when Jesus entered Jerusalem the *whole city was in turmoil*. Does that sound familiar? It does not take much of a perusal of the news outlets to see and experience this very real turmoil. It is there in our secular society and sadly, in our Church and faith communities. The reasons for today's turmoil are not all that different from those creating angst in the Holy City.

Back then it was about *Who is this man? Is he really the messiah?* In today's western world, societies and nations that have sought to eradicate the biblical revelations of God, have produced their own abundance of "messiahs". All we need to do is to move away from any and all notions that there is a God, that God has revealed the divine self and the divine will to us and we are left free to fill in the vacuum.

But these have not delivered on their promises. Our communities are now more divided than ever. Social media has replaced discussion, respectful debate and the importance of facts. Even truth itself has become subjective. This Palm Sunday we need to be awake and listening, for God sends us *the blessed One who comes in the Name of God*. We are reminded once again, of the way God can be trusted to fulfill all he promises in ways no other worldly promises can achieve. Those in need of salvation have it given to them.