

On the way to Calvary- Hilary McDowell

Week 4

Tuesday - Flags of Adoration

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

This took place to fulfil what was spoken through 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.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

*The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."
Matthew 21:1-11 (NIV)*

She had seen plenty of flag-weaving before. But now, standing amid a huge crowd of pushing, jostling people in her dream, she couldn't believe what they were waving. Moving along Jerusalem's narrow thoroughfares, anything and everything was being waved in the air, branches of every tree imaginable, even coats were being flourished and flung with abandon on the ground. And there she stood with her pitiable piece of bracken. She wished it could have been at least a fresh palm branch like the ones brandished by the children as they skipped along singing, 'Hosanna!'

Crowds were not new to Tracy. They were highlighted constantly in her time, through the media's insatiable appetite for news. She'd seen the mass hysteria of a football match, the pain of refugees fleeing in their thousands in the wake of a natural disaster, and, in Northern Ireland, flags of every creed and colour being used to protest or to wound, or to stake a claim to land that belonged only

to God. How people disappear in a crowd: individuals become faceless, responsibility becomes disembodied, we can blame 'the crowd'.

She studied the faces of the children, pushing and shoving all around her, their eyes full of excitement and innocent glee. They were welcoming their hero, the man who told great stories, who performed miracles, who did not push them away when adults were around - the man the adults said would set the country free from the oppression of the government's crippling taxes and domination. Maybe if they got close enough they'd see him do a magic trick, or he might even lift them up for a ride on his donkey. Who needed football to cheer for, or a pop star to scream for, when Jesus was in town?

All the while, the Master rode on slowly along the narrow, stony avenues towards the temple, with a determined look on his face. Tracy had to fight the surge of the surrounding bustle to push her way to the side of the donkey. 'Don't go, Lord, she pleaded. 'Please don't go. These people don't understand what you are trying to do. Look' and she extended her wind-burnt bracken, scorched by the heat of the people's own agendas.' She began to snap off brittle fragments of her bracken and let them flake away before his eyes as he rode on. 'They won't be faithful, Lord; these people will not stand by you. When the chips are down you can't rely on one of them. Don't go.'

They had reached the outer perimeter of the temple and Jesus was dismounting without haste. As he turned his eyes to look into her face, a thrill of such joy reverberated through her to her very soul. They were the eyes of someone who knew exactly what he was doing and knew too much to stop. The compassion she saw in those eyes was not for himself but for her. She knew that he was not about to speak; instead he raised his hand, pointing to the outer portal of the temple; and signalled for her to follow him in.

Without difficulty she gained admission. The outer courtyard was a kind of bustling marketplace, rather like the Sunday outdoor markets that she avoided at home. They always made her feel uncomfortable, knowing that there were better things to do for God on Sunday than buy and sell. She recognised the items on show as being legitimate purchases for any good Jew coming to make sacrifice at the altar - pigeons, and many kinds of animals. There were money changers too, lots of them, and she wondered how many were taking advantage of poverty-stricken worshippers after their long pilgrimage. Once you entered the temple, these stallholders had certainly cornered the market in essential religious items and the exchange rate at the money tables seemed none too reasonable. As women were allowed in this part of the temple, Tracy was able to move freely; and the more she examined, the less this place felt like a place of

prayer. She might just as well have been in the high street at home, and it galled her greatly.

She wasn't the only one. The crash of the first table being overturned made her swing round in consternation. Jesus, strong carpenter's muscles flexing, legs striding with ease, a terrible pain of disappointment and horror in his taut expression, was putting an end to this desecration of the Sabbath, this exploitation of the people, this defilement of his Father's house.

Dear Father,

What have we done to your house? How sacred is it now?

How much do we cherish one day in seven. Protecting it from the secular ravages, stresses and duties of the previous week?

Have I walked through the courtyards of my Sabbath and cleansed it totally and without reservation, as Jesus did? If he physically visited my time and place, what would he overturn? How can I help him, Father, and when should I start?

Every moment I delay, I see the pain and horror in his eyes. I can't reduce the suffering he endured two thousand years ago, but he has put me where I live to change things on my own doorstep.

Give me courage, Lord, for those around me will not like it. But then, they didn't like it much in your day either, did they, Lord?

Amen.