

On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell

Week 4

Wednesday - Listen to the Children

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,

"From the lips of children and infants

you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?"

And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Matthew 21:14-17 (NIV)

She didn't hang about the temple courtyard for long. Just long enough to witness the eager stream of sick people pouring into the courts of that huge building, seeking healing from Jesus. She wondered why he didn't leave, and leave fast, after his exceedingly practical demonstration of how things ought to change. Of course he would heal those who needed help, of that she had no doubt; but what she wanted to know was what was going on in the minds of the chief priests and scribes who had just witnessed their sanctuary disrupted and were listening, even now, to the adoration of many children's voices singing the Lord's praises, and proclaiming him to be the Son of David. Wouldn't that mean that he was heir to King David's throne?

Surely, to an ordinary Jew of the day, a king would take precedence over a priest - and especially if he claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah. No wonder she found the temple priests and scribes huddled together in consultation. In her dream she dared not go too close for fear of being seen, so it was a garbled conversation that she overheard. Anxious tones floated on the air like cinders from the fires of envy. She caught a scrap here, a phrase there - nothing was clear. But she gained that they saw Jesus as a threat to their position. He was unqualified, theologically untrained, a carpenter, and from Galilee of all places. No much good comes from there, they thought. He had no right to teach the people. That was their job; their role was in jeopardy. Now today he had set the cat among the pigeons - quite literally, one of them quipped, and she was glad that at least somebody had a sense of humour.

But he couldn't go insulting their 'customers' like this. Much-needed revenue from the temple came from those market stallholders and all the business they did. How were they going to meet their quota, or afford repairs to the building, or even draw a salary, if revenue dropped? Besides, he's playing at God, isn't he, doing miracles in broad daylight? 'Yes,' said the scribe with the sense of humour, 'but what harm has he done?'

A stunned silence followed for several seconds. Heads moved closer together, tongues clicked rapidly, suggestions she could not hear were thrown into the ring and rejected with shakes of the head. Then, finally, like one discovering the holy grail, a raised voice proclaimed, 'Lazarus!'

'Yes,' barked another, 'people think he raised him from the dead. We can't have that.'

'He claims to be able to forgive sins,' said another. 'Only God can do that.'

It was almost as if the huddled group breathed a corporate sigh of relief. They parted in good spirits.

With a heavy heart she returned to the street where small knots of people were still slowly labouring up the hill to the temple. Perched on a tethering-stone, one without a camel attached, Tracy tuned in again to the sound of innocent children's laughter. Half a dozen or so were playing nearby as their parents prepared to eat a meagre snack.

Jesus had welcomed the praises of the children and had firmly aligned himself to the creative role of his Father God, quoting Psalm 8 where the same praises were addressed to God himself. The traveller, weary from her journey thus far, rested within her temporary dream state and worshipped the Father in rest and sleep.

'O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!'

Dear God,

Thank you for being here for me. When attacks come and when enemies rage, thank you for being still in control.

'You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.'

Help me remember that I worship alongside angels and archangels, and yet the children have got it right, for their worship is unself-conscious, trusting and without fear, whatever the cost. Forgive my building of defences when the only protection I really need is trust in you.

'When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.'

In fear I forget to look upwards. Frightened, I miss out on the beauty and wonder you have created for me to enjoy. I don't deserve your care for me, your interest in my little life, your great sacrifice of love on my behalf. From where did you get the greatness to stoop so low to raise us high?

'You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea.'

Poor donkey, I wasn't much good for him, was I, Lord? So busy chasing my own deadlines to 'help' the Saviour that I missed the significance of the sacred trust of all things 'under my feet', things and creatures that you have entrusted to my care. Ah, Lord, and maybe people too. Grant me grace to serve all those you put within my way.

'O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!'

Help me to listen to the children Lord. They got it right - Jesus and the Father are one. That wonderful word, 'Hosanna' - 'save me' - to them on the entry to Jerusalem was no more or less than an exuberant shout of joy. Joyfully I shout too: thank you for your majestic love! Amen.