

MARK 11:1-11
A RED-CARPET KING?

It's the red-carpet treatment! Do you ever watch the Oscars or any awards' ceremony like that? The celebs walk up the red carpet; the press are there; George Alagiah will warn you that this report contains flash photography; TV crews are there by the dozen, all trying to get an interview with the latest star, or to get the most up-to-date gossip from the stars. The fashion gurus are all watching back in the studio to analyse what the women are wearing and who created it and why did they bother! It's all a great show and those who are being shown off enjoy it for a time; by next week, the red carpet has gone and for some of them a much more mundane reality kicks in and they become an unemployed actor, looking for work!

The Palm Sunday story has that kind of feel to it. It feels like a red-carpet story with the crowds cheering and waving their palm branches and creating their own red carpet of coats, cloaks and palm branches for the donkey to walk over. It feels like the crowd greeting someone very special into their town, recognising someone important and making sure that He is well welcomed. It is meant to have that feel to it; that is the right kind of feel because the story is about Jesus deliberately saying to people "here is your king! I am your King!" Some 500 years before, looking into the future, Zechariah the prophet had said: "*Rejoice, greatly...*" (*Zechariah 9:9*) and Jesus deliberately fulfils these words and says to the people "Here is your king!" They give Him the red-carpet treatment and there is great excitement in the crowd that day!

We assume that this crowd is full of enthusiasm and faith, but perhaps not all are excited. There may well have been different kinds of reactions to Jesus and to Palm Sunday:

1. Confused disciples The crowds had been following Jesus everywhere; they had seen Him do some quite spectacular things, like walking on the water and feeding 5000 people with only a few loaves and fishes, but we've also seen that they didn't always appreciate or understand what was going on. Their hearts were hard at times and their faith was small. Some question just how much the crowds of disciples would have understood of this Palm Sunday; how much did they appreciate at the time what Jesus was doing? They suggest that the crowds might have been more confused by this. Jesus was clear what He was doing, but the disciples maybe only understood afterwards, with hindsight. Here, for them, Jesus the Messiah was still hidden; they were not yet ready to see Jesus as King!

2. Critical Pharisees Mark doesn't tell us about the Pharisees in his account of Palm Sunday, but others do; they tell Jesus to have the crowd be quiet and to stop shouting 'Hosanna'. They knew very well what He was claiming by this action; they didn't like it! He was claiming to be God's Chosen One, come to save Israel; the Pharisees were worried that the crowds seemed to believe Him as well; as the week would progress, they were never far behind Jesus, wondering what His next move would be, but busy trying to trick Him, and find Him out; so they missed what He was really offering. All they could do was criticise because He was a threat to their position; He was more popular with the crowds than they were and didn't like it; so they would use their power to criticise Him on Palm Sunday and later use their power to have Him crucified.

3. Curious donkey owner How did the owner of the donkey feel about his donkey being required? "*Jesus sent...*" (11:1-3) we know nothing about the man who owned the donkey; some suggest that he was a follower of Jesus in the first place and he told Jesus about the donkey and so the disciples knew where to go. Others suggest

that the owner of the donkey gave permission, but then came along to see why his donkey was so important to Jesus. Maybe he had heard some of the stories of Jesus and this was an opportunity for him to go and see Jesus for himself, to see what Jesus is like and maybe catch something of special-ness of the man. So he went to see Jesus, curious as to what might happen next, or what these things meant!

4. Certain followers There were some who understood all that was going on. "*Hosanna...*" (11:9f) and they knew that by shouting these words, they were greeting their King, that Jesus was the One who had come in the name of the Lord to be the King and Saviour of His people. Perhaps they had learned this over the months and years of watching Him, following Him, listening to Him and they knew their Bible and they saw exactly what He was doing and they were delighted to shout His praise and welcome the King into His city. They also knew that there was more to come, though maybe not what that was. The events of the week would be traumatic when Jesus died and then seeing the risen Christ, meeting Him alive again, just confirmed what they knew – Jesus was come to save the world and be Lord and King forever. For them, He was more than just a red-carpet King, but the King of the universe, king forever and king over their hearts and minds.

Perhaps you're confused by Jesus, or by this story and you're not sure what this is all about. Jesus a King? Riding on a donkey? People waving palm branches? It doesn't make sense. Or you've always had a critical attitude to Jesus, always seeing flaws in the argument, never really letting yourself respond to Him positively. Or maybe you're just curious: I conducted a school assembly last week and the feedback was interesting, because many of young people had never heard the Easter story before and were curious to know. Churches are not always full of certain followers, but are contain people who are confused, critical and curious, people who come to the Bible and the person of Jesus with their confusion, with their criticisms, with their curiosity and want to learn, and find out more. From that confusion, criticism and curiosity faith is born and grows, until the day comes when we can say with certainty: "*I know...*" (2 Timothy 1:12)

Of this, I am certain, Jesus is no red-carpet King! He was no 'here-today-gone-tomorrow' celeb. He came to be the King of His people forever. This is not about power and control, but about authority and service. He came to show us what life can be like, what people can really be; He came to teach us to love God and love neighbour and how to do that; He came to be the model of life for us and how to live, what kind of people to be and how to love and serve. He showed us all of that in His teaching, in His lifestyle, and above all in Easter week, showing Him as a humble Man, giving Himself to die on the cross. He came to be the saviour and Lord for the whole world and this was fulfilled in Easter week. This is the Jesus that the Church proclaims; this Jesus inspires faith and obedience; this Jesus will be same kind of King forever; He will not go away, but will draw us and people like us to Him again and again and again.