

## **Palm Sunday** March 28<sup>th</sup> 2021

Mark 11.1-11

Journey! They say life is a journey. And in this Church, we are all part of each other's spiritual journey. Like any of us, Jesus began His life's journey when He was born ... but in a stable in Bethlehem. Little did He know – or anybody know at that stage of thankfulness and celebration – that His journey would end on the stark construction of a T-shaped cross, with cruel nails driven into his body.

Many of the people on that first Palm Sunday – making the journey into Jerusalem with Jesus – wouldn't have seen that cross looming large. Some might have thought: "He's taking a risk riding so publicly into Jerusalem – riding on a donkey, a kingly beast. What kind of a statement is He making? He's already flaunted the Jewish Laws and authorities by healing on the Sabbath. Surely this can't go on." And of course it couldn't. And Jesus knew where this journey was leading Him. But He knew He had to make the journey with the inevitable end result – the ultimate sacrifice!

I must say, this journey that Christ made reminds me a little of the humble piper in the battles of the First World War. The humble piper shared with the soldiers all the fear, disease and hardship of the trenches. And when it was time for the troops to move forward, who was it who went first? The humble piper – unarmed, unprotected, heralding his position and purpose by blowing on his bagpipes. But on many occasions, the piper had more effect on the troops than the commanding officer, because he went first – unarmed and unprotected.

The difference between his situation and that of Jesus was that the known enemy was in front. His friends were behind and alongside. In Jesus' situation, who were His friends? The crowd strewing cloaks and palm branches in His path would turn against Him within a few days and be crying for His blood. His disciples would desert Him, and Peter would openly deny Him.

It's perhaps fitting that this palm cross put into our hands ... as we make our journey with Christ travelling into Jerusalem ... this palm cross will perhaps be one of many to be burned ... to make the ash crosses for Ash Wednesday, when the penitential journey of Lent begins again.

But journey doesn't have to be a sad or negative experience. And the Christian journey through the year should be one of joy, of growth, and of

learning. We're lucky to be sharing a little part of the journey with Katie and Liam, whose banns are being read over these weeks, and who will begin their journey as a married couple in the next few weeks. We'll also have a chance to make a journey into new opportunities, when we attend the Annual Church Meeting - the APDM - in a few weeks' time. Perhaps those opportunities will be unknown to us at the moment, but they will no doubt call forth a response. And Alison is soon to be making her journey through sabbatical - a journey that will take her in study, growth, learning and reflection ... that much closer to Christ!

But we're all there, aren't we? We're all on this journey. And if we really live this Holy Week - not just think of it today and Easter Day - if we really consider Holy Week to be, spiritually, the most important week of the Christian year, then we will make this journey with Christ. We won't just be observers. We'll be there. We'll be alongside as Christ is alongside us in joy and adversity.

I think the special part of this week is our ability - and the permission we're given - to be alongside Jesus. There was no other time in His life when He was so vulnerable, so at risk and so unprotected. There was never a time when He was more in need of a friend - of human contact and love. He received it in little recognisable ways as He journeyed to the cross. But He needs it from us as well. He needs it in our prayers and our devotion. He needs it in our kindness to one another.

Thinking back to the humble piper of the First World War, many of them saw little of the fighting, because they were mown down quite early in the battle. Having said that, there was one piper who lived long enough to be decorated because, against all the odds, he had survived several battles. But Christ had no intention of surviving His ordeal. He was en route to the cross and He knew it. We too, as we hear the Passion narrative being read in a few moments - begin that journey with Christ. It's our special chance in the year to be there for Jesus in His frailty and vulnerability.

Let's not waste this opportunity. Let's make the journey with Him!