

**29th March, 2015.**

**Readings: Zechariah 9: 9 - 10**

**Luke 19: 28 - 40, 45 - 46**

**Sermon: Power versus Love**

Two weeks ago today, in the afternoon, I was on a bus heading through Los Christianos on my way to Mount Teide to see the sun set above the clouds and to see the various star constellations. It was an amazing trip but there was something else amazing happening in Los Christianos that day which I saw last year. It was the Carnival.

Hundreds turn out to see the procession which is incredibly colourful and entertaining. All ages take part, from wee tots to pensioners. There is an excitement in the air as the various floats and dancers and entertainers pass by. The costumes are amazing and despite the heat, the participants dance their way around the town for a good couple of hours.

Processions have a habit of drawing a crowd, sometimes out of curiosity, but also because everyone wants to be part of whatever is happening.

We have the same crowds gather here in Lochgilphead for the lantern parade, all eager to see what is coming down the road and who is coming down the road. It's not quite as colourful because it's night time and the middle of winter and everyone is wrapped up to keep out the cold but it is just as exciting and effective in its own way.

The procession through Jerusalem on Palm Sunday also created a sense of excitement in the city. The Old

Testament Prophecy from Zechariah would not be missed by them. Their King had come riding on a colt as it had been prophesied which for them meant that Rome would be overthrown.

The crowds gathered, straining to see Jesus and they waved their palm branches and threw down their coats in reverence and in celebration as their King passed by.

But there was a difference. Although the crowds made a noise as they shouted **Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!**, the procession itself was quiet. There is no report of Jesus waving or even getting caught up in the excitement. That emotion belonged only to the crowd, the crowd which had misunderstood who exactly was in their midst and what it meant for Jesus to be their King.

As I was thinking about Palm Sunday and Jesus' procession into Jerusalem, I decided to go online to see if I could find a new slant on Palm Sunday and I did. I came across a sermon by a minister called Chuck Warnock who talked about another procession which he said had happened in Jerusalem on the same day. Whether that is accurate or not, I can't say, although apparently Roman historians recorded it as having taking place. If this other procession was on the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem, then the contrast between it and Jesus' procession would be quite striking.

Chuck Warnock says that Pontius Pilate led a procession of Roman cavalry and centurions into the city of Jerusalem. From the opposite side of the city from

which Jesus entered, Pilate led Roman soldiers on foot and on horseback.

Each soldier, it is reported, was clad in leather armour, polished to a high gloss. On each centurion's head, hammered helmets gleamed in the bright sunlight. At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel; and, in their hands, each centurion carried a spear; or if he was an archer, a bow with a sling of arrows across his back. Accompanying them was a drumbeat because this was no ordinary entry into Jerusalem.

It was common practice for Roman governors of foreign territory, governors like Pontius Pilate, to be present when there was a religious festival but this presence signified more than that. This was a show of force. It was a sign that allegiance to another King, that is, to Jesus, would be dealt with quite forcefully. The Romans were not about to be overthrown and the message to the people would be clear. Rise up at your peril.

But they wanted change. They wanted rid of Roman rule and so they welcomed the King on a donkey but disappointment lay ahead. The King didn't come on a white charger with an army at his back. He didn't come in power with His arm raised in battle. He came in peace but issuing a challenge to many of those whom He met in that final week.

Jesus had already challenged the rulers of Judea. When he said to the lame man, **your sins are forgiven**, He challenged the authority of the Temple system. The

Temple was no longer the only place that your sins could be forgiven.

When He cleared the Temple, He exposed the corruption of the Temple tax, the scandalous exchange rate and the dishonesty of those who sold animals for sacrifice.

When Jesus said the Temple would be destroyed, that was a challenge to those who made their living from the Temple: the scribes, the Chief Priest, the ruling council of the Sanhedrin, the religious parties, the Pharisees and Sadducees. They would all lose their power and their prestige if there was no Temple.

Jesus alienated powerful people, many of whom ruled on Rome's behalf and were part of the same system of oppression and domination to which Pilate belonged.

The ordinary people that day sided with Jesus because they thought He could do for them what Rome did for those in positions of power. They thought He could make their lives better, that He could rid their country of corruption and that He could deliver them from the oppressive system under which they lived and worked.

By the end of the week, it was clear, that Jesus was not going to do any of those things, at least not in the way that the crowds expected and so they needed to protect their own backs.

Jesus was attracting the attention of the Roman empire with His actions and with His with claims and the people feared, with some justification, that the might of the Roman empire, as seen in Pilate's procession, would

come down hard and fast on them and on the entire nation.

To save their own backs, the Jews needed to show loyalty to Rome and so condemned Jesus to death on the Cross.

It's easy to judge but what would we have done if we had seen both processions in Jerusalem that day? Which procession would we have followed? If we had followed Jesus, would our allegiance have shifted by the end of the week as well?

Would we have chosen power and might over love? What do we choose in our daily lives? I have a couple of friends who seek out every injustice they can find on the internet, from animal cruelty to human trafficking, from corruption to poverty to human rights and they share every one of those on Facebook and seek the support of all who read the articles or see the videos.

They write letters to those in power and they sign petitions to fight the battles of those who have no voice or whose voices are not heard.

What do we do? Jesus tackled corruption and injustice. Do we just tut tut at it and get on with our lives? Are we immune to all those causes out there which come about because of the power and the might that many yield over those much less fortunate?

Would Jesus see evidence of love in our actions and in our attitudes and in what we say or does it look to Him as though we are siding with the Romans, with those in power rather than with those who are downtrodden and

treated unjustly, not just in our own country but throughout our world?

The challenge which Jesus issued when He rode into Jerusalem, he issues still today. Whose side are we are on? The choice is ours.

I close with the words of a well known hymn.

Who is on the Lord's side?  
Who will serve the King?  
Who will be His helpers  
Other lives to bring?  
Who will leave the world's side?  
Who will face the foe?  
Who is on the Lord's side?  
Who for Him will go?  
By thy call of mercy,  
By thy grace divine,  
We are on the Lord's side,  
Saviour we are thine.

Can we claim those words as our own, this Palm Sunday?