

**Brackenhurst Methodist 5 April 2009 pm (Palm Sunday)**  
**The Vulnerable Follower: With Jesus on Palm Sunday**

**Welcome & Notices**

**Scripture:**

Mark 11:1-11

**Message**

**INTRODUCTION**

- Friends, as I mentioned earlier, today, Palm Sunday, is officially the start of Holy Week
  - A week in which we journey with Jesus from his entry into Jerusalem, to the cross on Good Friday
    - \* And to his Resurrection on Easter Sunday.
- While we're going to be having services on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday there are other church who have already started extensive celebration
  - Preaching started this past Friday, and will continue everyday until Easter Sunday
    - \* With two service on Friday, and an all night vigil on Saturday night through to the sunrise service on Sunday morning
  - And traditionally it is either at this Saturday night service, or at the Sunday morning service where baptism, and confirmation of the baptisms take place
    - \* With Lent being a preparation for the celebration
- And of course the Easter celebrations are an appropriate time for baptisms because in our baptism we remember in going under the water Christ's death
  - And in coming up out of the water his resurrection into new life.
- That's why we planned confirmation this year, just before the schools broke up.
  - Ideally it should have been on Easter
    - \* Or we could have had a special Saturday evening service for baptisms and confirmation
- But of course in our culture many people go away and I have no doubt that I would have been in terrible trouble had I done it that way.
  - But that for me is one of the sadnesses of this time of the year.
- It is the high point of our faith as Christians
  - Yes, Christmas is special because we celebrate God being born in human form
- But Easter is the time when we celebrate, and are reminded of God's incredible love for us

- A love that is demonstrated for us on the cross: “It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us”
  - \* And a love that reminds us that self-giving love always, always overcomes the greatest evil that can be thrown at us.
- Yet sadly our culture suggests that this pivotal time in the life of Jesus is the time when we should go away on holiday and enjoy ourselves, rather than focussing on what our faith is really about
- And so this evening, as we continue in our sermon series looking at Journeying with Jesus
  - We look at the theme of being a vulnerable follower: and of being with Jesus on Palm Sunday.
- I’m using as my reading this evening the version of the story from Mark’s gospel
  - As you know Mark’s gospel was the first gospel written, and both Matthew and Luke copied their gospels from them and then expanded them with their own and common traditions and interpretations
- So this is the earliest story we have of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem.
  - And the remarkable thing about Mark’s gospel is that while it is the shortest, it is also the gospel that proportionally gives the most space to what we call Christ's Passion.
    - \* When we say passion we’re not saying that Christ was passionate about what he was doing, rather the word comes from a Latin word which means ‘suffering’, and a full half of Mark’s gospel is about the suffering of Christ.
- Mark’s gospel begins very simply as “the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God...” (1:1)
  - There are no stories of angels appearing to Mary; no stories of the virgin birth, no shepherds in the fields or stars over Bethlehem.
- The gospel starts with John baptising in the desert, and before we’re even half way through chapter 1, Jesus goes into Galilee, proclaiming the good news about God, saying that the Kingdom of God is at hand.
  - Then Mark spends the next nearly eight chapters recording three years of Jesus ministry
- Till towards the end of Chapter 8 the tone, the mood changes as Jesus predicts his death and sets out for Jerusalem to be crucified.
  - And the last eight chapters record the last few weeks in Jesus life as he heads towards Jerusalem, and then enters it in the story we read tonight.
    - \* So clearly it is an important time in the church year

- As we reflect on the story we see that Jesus offers us a divine paradigm for being pastoral people, and the story of Palm Sunday offers to us two ways of being a vulnerable follower.
  - Vulnerability in our Humility
  - Vulnerability in our Tears

### **(1) Vulnerability in Humility**

- Firstly, then, vulnerability in our humility.
  - Mark isn't so clear on the humility of Jesus in his entrance, rather it is Matthew's Gospel in which we find a humble Jesus, entering on a donkey, reflecting that this is the fulfilment of scripture
- But there is a remarkable prologue to the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem
  - You will remember the request of James and John
  - In one story they themselves come to Jesus, in another version their mother comes to Jesus
    - \* But the request is the same
  - They want status in Jesus' coming Kingdom: they want to sit at his left and right
- Of course that makes the others pretty angry, so Jesus has to discuss this issue with them
  - And he teaches them that that the one who wants to be great must be the servant of all
- And now Jesus demonstrates this in the way he enters Jerusalem.
  - Now I've not heard what I'm about to tell you before, but it sounds very credible to me and so I gladly share it with you
- The person who has developed this theory is a man called Marcus Borg.
  - A well known author — very worth while reading his books, you can download some of his talks from the internet
    - \* Gives me goosebumps — pack up and move so I can sit at his feet!
- He has a DPhil degree from Oxford and is also Hunderer Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture at Oregon State University
  - But I like the way he thinks and his theology resonates with me
- But he describes this theory in his book “The Last Week” looking at the last days of Jesus' Life
  - And what he is suggesting ties in with what I've been saying this year about challenging the structures and authorities and the way we live,
    - \* The kind of stuff i spoke about on camp

- Borg suggests this: He says there were actually two processions that entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.
  - There was the procession of Pontius Pilate as he moved from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem for the Passover.
  - And then there was the procession of Jesus and his ragged band of followers as he entered from the East
- Any entry from the East into Jerusalem was a magnificent one
  - Come up out of Jericho — the lowest city on earth into up to the mount of Olives
    - \* You climb from 800ft below to 3000 ft sea level in about 20 km (1200m)
  - And travel through desert into the lush vegetation of the mount of Olives
    - \* But for Jesus followers they would have not just had the excitement of entering Jerusalem, but also the expectation and excitement that Jesus was coming into the city as a King
  - So there is this procession on this amazing route with all sorts of expectations
- And then Pontius Pilate enters from Caesarea Philippi, from the West.
  - Because Passover was a time for the Jews to assert the national identity and desire for autonomy
    - \* Remember the Passover embraced the idea of freedom from slavery in Egypt
  - It was Pilate's tradition that at Passover he would move his headquarters from Caesarea Philippi in the north into Jerusalem entering through the west gate
    - \* And he would enter representing the whole might of the Roman army
  - He would enter on the finest stallion with all his troops and slaves embodying the domination and imperial strength and power of Rome.
- And then entering, entering in the east gate there was the procession of Jesus with the King of creation on the donkey with his humble bunch of followers defenceless and vulnerable.
  - The might of Rome opposed to the power of love
- And as much as we can see those two processions this evening, and as much as we know the clash which is to come in just a few days
  - We have to recognise that there are two ways of living out the Christian faith
- We can live out the Christian faith in dominance, might and control, as illustrated by Pilate with the might of Rome behind him
  - Or we can live out our Christian faith in the way of humility, vulnerability, defencelessness and suffering love.
- And I think that the way we choose to live out our Christianity also carries into every other aspect of our lives

- There are two ways to drive a car
- there are two ways to relate to your partner in marriage
- Two ways to raise a child
- Two ways to resolve conflict.
  - \* In might and power, or in humility and vulnerability
- I do need to say that there are times when authority needs to be asserted
  - Parents cannot allow children to run roughshod over them; Law cannot allow criminals to have the upper hand and so on; etc
    - \* Jesus understood this
  - He never allowed his authority to be undermined by anyone
    - \* There were many times when he rebuked his disciples
- But there is a different principal to how we live our life when we choose to become vulnerable followers with Jesus on Palm Sunday
  - So which procession are you going to be a part of?

## **(2) Vulnerability in Tears**

- The second thought on being a vulnerable follower of Jesus that I want to introduce to you this evening is that of vulnerability in tears
  - On Palm Sunday we are introduced to the tears of Jesus as he weeps over Jerusalem.
    - \* There are only two occasions when we see Jesus weeping - here and over the death Lazarus in John's gospel.
  - This particular event is recorded only by Luke in 20:41 as he approaches the city, but it illustrates the humanity and vulnerability of God.
- As Christ followers we need not just to be aware of our vulnerability, but to be willing to be honest about it.
  - And I think that this is one of the areas that we are good at being bad at!
- So often we are taught that as Christians we have to be victorious
  - We're not allowed to show that we're down, that we're hurting, we're struggling.
  - We have to always believe that God is in control, and God's plan is best, and I'm submitted to God's will for my life
- I don't think God wants that!
  - More than anything God wants honesty!
- And the honest truth of our lives as Christians is that they are mostly not perfect
  - Often they are filled with tears
- Yet our tears lie at the heart of the gospel, of ministry, at the heart of reaching out to others.

- Tears take us into the heart of God.
- There are times when Jesus doesn't just weep over Jerusalem, but he weeps over us
  - I have often said to you we are free to choose to do anything; we are not free to choose the consequences — and God weeps over those consequences
  - He doesn't sit in heaven somewhere judging us, but weeps over the mess we make of our lives.
    - \* And sometimes we are so slow to acknowledge that
- What does God weep over today in my life? What choices do we make that lead to our destruction?
  - What does God weep over in the church? In our country?
- What does God weep over?
  - Let's be vulnerable to those things that cause God to weep.
- And there are other times when God doesn't weep over us, but God weeps with us.
- Sometimes being a vulnerable follower is about being honest with God about our tears and knowing that he shares them with us
  - And we all struggle
    - \* I struggle, just because I stand up here doesn't mean that everything in my life is all fine
- I'm struggling at the moment because I don't know where I'm going to be going next year
  - I've been for interviews and preaching but I keep hearing the same things
    - \* You're too old
    - \* You're too young
    - \* We want a family man
  - You know, that knocks your self confidence and then my calling requires me to stand up here and preach as though those things are wrong
    - \* When I've really been left to feel as though I'm hopeless
  - But at the same time it has given me a better understanding of what people go through who really struggle to find work
    - \* I know I'll have an appointment at year end — in may be in De Aar, but at least I'll have food on the table and a roof over my head
- But it has helped me to weep with those who are going through similar things
  - As vulnerable followers of Jesus it means weeping with those who weep.
- we are formed and shaped by our tears, we need to allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

## **Conclusion**

- Let me close off
  - Palm Sunday reminds us of the paradox of ministry
- And how God's power is revealed in vulnerability:
  - Jesus on a donkey
  - Jesus as he weeps.
- I have only one question this evening:
  - Are we willing to be vulnerable followers?
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

## **Prayer of Response and Intercession**

- All I am

## **Benediction**