Palm Sunday 5th April 2020 Talk for St James Bolton

So, it’s Palm Sunday! Lent has been strange this year, in this time of Coronavirus Crisis the suffering of Christ has taken on new significance as we witness the suffering of so many, not only in our own country but across the entire world…Jesus suffers with them, and with us. This Easter will be like no other…for many we feel bereft at being unable to meet together physically BUT we choose to remember on this Palm Sunday that Jesus is our King, as we heard…

*Mathew 21 ‘See, your king comes to you gently and riding on a donkey…Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest!’*

St Paul, in his letters tells us numerous times that when we put our trust in Him, Jesus comes to live in us…I pray you will know that more and more deeply in these days. As Jesus takes up residence in us, we realise we are blessed to know the wonders of his love, truly blessed to know deep in the core of our being that we really are the children of God. BUT we will soon realise that there are some changes that need to be made in us in order that our lives bring honour to Him. Psalm 118 we heard used a building analogy. ‘The stone the builders rejected (Jesus) has become the capstone (the stone that holds everything together!)…Extending this picture , let me quote C S Lewis, ‘*Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself…*Jesus wants to build a palace, & so there’s a bit of DIY SOS going on, indeed there needs to be some wholescale refurbishment and renovation in each of our lives so that Jesus can truly be our king! Lent is such a season to remind ourselves that we need to co-operate with Jesus in this project! At the risk of mixing our metaphors, Jesus reminds us in John 15 that we need pruning so that we bear much fruit to glorify our Father in Heaven.

St Peter (1 Pet 2:5) extends the building image to tell us that we are *like living stones , being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood*…did you realise that we’re all called to be priests?…A priest is someone who ministers to others on behalf of God…that is surely what we need to learn to do in this present crisis, as we let Jesus be our King and work in us and through us.

Jesus is our king…and yet he is unlike the world’s model of what a king looks like. The crowds on that first Palm Sunday hailed him as king, but few days later many of them were jeering at him and calling for his crucifixion. What were they expecting, someone to aggressively wage war on the Romans and take back control of Jerusalem? That kind of king would have rode in on a white stallion, a bloody sword in his hand… your king comes to you humbly and riding on a donkey…on a donkey an animal fit for a poor working person…Jesus our humble King…but he is triumphant! His weapons are not a sword and spear but a towel and a cross…he comes with love, forgiveness and grace. These weapons have won our victory…they are the only weapons we can as his disciples can use.

Of course, the New Testament reminds us we are in a battle, read Ephesians Chapter 5…and in our current situation, it feels like the enemy is winning…but have faith our King is coming!

To close here are some words again from C S Lewis, which he wrote in 1942, they are so apt for these days: *‘Satan said, ‘I will cause anxiety, fear, panic. I will shutdown business, schools, places of worship and sports events. I will cause economic turmoil.’ Jesus replied, ‘I will bring together neighbours, restore the family unit, I will bring dinner back to the kitchen table. I will help people slow down their lives and appreciate what really matters. I will teach my children to rely on me and not the world. I will teach my children to trust me and not their money and material resources.’*…Your king Jesus is coming, listen to him and see opportunities even in these days of social distancing. Amen

Rev Steve Lees