

Chaos – a thousand emotions

(Preached at Footscray Baptist Church on Palm Sunday April 5, 2020 by Cheryl Williams– Matthew 21:1-17)

At Gala Day (the Geelong equivalent of Moomba), I was always filled with excitement – the floats, the night time market with rides and games to play. Later, I stood in the biggest demonstration in Victoria’s history against Kennett’s cuts – I felt proud my boss had let me take time off to protest the injustice I saw in this state. Twice in a decade I stood my ground in the city square to make a statement about peace and not invading Iraq for the sake of oil. Tears filled my eyes as I marched for peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in that first Palm Sunday walk for reconciliation with our first peoples. With mixed emotions I walked down the tram tracks on Sydney Road in a silent protest seeking the end of violence towards women after the death of Jill Meagher just metres from the church where I was worshipping. As I walked with some children I prayed for safety, prayed that good would overcome evil and these girls one day would be able to walk these streets in peace and safety.

I have been in my share of marches, protests and parades. Each one different, each reason different, each time a different emotion at the fore – anger, sadness, protesting, seeking justice or excitement.

We can’t go out right now, but we watch events from our lounge rooms and still feel many emotions – confused, angry, deeply sad, frightened, frustrated, grateful.

On that first Palm Sunday we find many different people with many different reasons and many different emotions in the crowd. A bit chaotic with a thousand different emotions swirling around.

In the crowd are many people.

There are the disciples, they have been with him for a while now, watching what he does, listening to his teaching, watching the crowds and seeing how they react. Lives turned upside down. Asked to go and collect a couple of donkeys – I wonder if they knew what would happen next, where they would go and what fate would befall Jesus. They just did as they were asked.

There are those who see Jesus as the messiah, the saviour, the liberator for whom they have longed. They honour him and cheer him on – waving branches, throwing clothes on the ground making a red carpet as it were.

No doubt some there would have been curious and wanting to find out more.

Some would have thought of him as a nuisance, getting in the way of their tasks for the day, getting in the way of how they are used to doing things.

Some of them would have heard about the signs he had done, the healings he had done and wondered if he was a bit of a magician.

Some would have just been caught up in the hype, it is easy to get caught up in the hype when it is all around you.

There are those who see Jesus as the healer.

There are the priests and scribes. Watching very carefully. Perhaps waiting to see if Jesus would trip up, gathering evidence as they watch. Plotting to get rid of someone who was becoming a bit difficult for them, someone who was gathering a bit of a following and getting more popular by the day and what's more was calling into question some of their practices. Jesus was becoming more and more of a problem for them.

There are the traders. They have set themselves up in the temple, doing legitimate business, well sort of. They are selling doves which people used as a sacrifice, these were the sacrifices the poor people could afford. However, they are exploiting the poor – perhaps charging ridiculous prices they can't afford. They are putting their profit margin above the people's need to practice their religious duty, to worship and to pray. Guess they weren't expecting to be turfed out on their backsides.

And then there is Jesus. What emotions are going through his mind? Is he worried about the crowd, their cheering? Is he worried that he is getting too popular? Does he see his critics in the crowd? Is he worrying about why they are there and what they are planning?

No matter what, he sets his face toward Jerusalem, toward danger. Is he filled with sadness? Is he fearful? Or is he resolute and able to leave it all in God's hands.

But first he will go to his friends in Bethany and gather one last time with his friends, with his students.

So, what do we see in this story that we can take in to our confusing times?

1. Jesus enters the city in a very different way, a humble way, giving dignity to a beast of burden, a donkey. Jesus has a new way of doing things, things are turned on their head – the show of power does not have the last say, rather humility which is the way of God will have the last word.

Jesus offers a different way – that life is not about power and privilege rather it is about humility and peace.

2. Jesus faces what is to come head on – he doesn't detour, rather he heads to Jerusalem despite the danger it holds for him.

Jesus offers as an example of trusting our lives into God's hands.

3. Jesus protects the little people from their exploiters, he will not have the rich take from the poor and especially not in the house of God.

Jesus always cares for the little people, the ones who are at risk of those more powerful – an example we might just need to follow in this time.

4. In the midst of chaos, Jesus takes the time to heal those in need.

Jesus allows those in need to interrupt him and ask for help, for healing.

We make our way to Easter this year in very different circumstances. Maybe this year is a chance to really enter into the story from Palm Sunday to Easter Day. To walk with and learn from Jesus as his friends share meals with him, as they wash his feet or have their feet washed, as they share a meal, as they betray and deny him and as they watch him offer the greatest sacrifice one can offer and then as they meet him in the Garden and at the beach and experience his resurrection for them and for all.

So, this week go and reflect on the peace, the tension the confusion, the sorrow and the joy that this event, central to our faith, offers us. Amen.