

What is going on here?

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, April 2nd, 2023 - Matthew 21:1-17)

I knew I had to go to Jerusalem to face the music, besides it was almost Passover and I have often gone to Jerusalem to celebrate that.

Much has happened in the last three years.

- Led into the desert and tempted with food, power and safety.
- Kicked out of the temple, just because I dared to suggest God's love was universal, he had no favourites.
- I gained all kinds of followers – fishermen, women, tax collectors.
- There were a few memorable encounters:
 - The woman at well, who I chatted to and she seemed to believe I was sent by God, and went back and told everyone in her community,
 - Nicodemus, scared by the same people who I was beginning to fear, but keen to find me and ask questions.
 - A blind man, who had more insight than those who gave him a hard time and who could not see the obvious
 - And dear Lazarus and his sisters, who looked after me so often.

I knew I was in trouble, but now others were in danger too – Lazarus, they wanted to kill him now after he had been restored to wholeness.

A friend said I could borrow a donkey to make the journey, a donkey, my mother had taken a donkey on long journey before I was born. Anyway, I got some other friends to collect it and we headed to Jerusalem.

When we arrived there was a frenzy, people everywhere, grabbing branches off the trees and waving them, shouting and singing. Laying their clothes on the ground for us to ride over – treating me like a King! If only they realized what kind of King I truly was.

So many people – those who had followed me, had been in the crowds when I fed them and taught them, those who had really turned their lives around, those who argued with me, those who I know were intrigued by me, the religious leaders, my fellow Rabbis, some who loved me, others who couldn't wait to see the back of me, some just caught up in the hype of the day, some who thought I was a revolutionary, a freedom fighter, some even believed I was the long awaited Messiah.

I scanned the crowd to see who I recognize:

- Peter – dear Peter, impetuous but could be fickle too, think he is a bit worried about all the attention we seemed to be getting.
- Thomas – an earnest fellow, said he was ready to follow me anywhere, yet he always needed solid proof, had to be certain before he would believe anything.
- Judas – who is he talking to? I had recently started to worry about him, he seemed different. He used to pay all our bills but I wondered if he was taking a

cut, he was just different. He seemed to be talking to religious leaders, what was that about?

- Religious leaders – huddled together, like they were hatching some kind of plan. I knew most of them didn't like me, I had challenged some of their ideas, I was putting people before rules, and I think I was getting a bit too popular for their liking.
- Some of my family seem to be in the crowd too, must have made their way to the Jerusalem for Passover too.
- The women who cared for and provided for me and my friends were singing out and shouting, there with the disciples.

Finally, I made it through the crowd, I really just wanted to get through, so I could go and make my offering as was my practice at the temple. I was humbled by their praises and welcome but also a little worried by some I saw there, the ones who seem to be out to get me at any chance they had, accused me of breaking their laws. I made it into the temple.

I went in ready to buy the sacrifice that I was going to offer, I become enraged, here were all these people making money out of the poor people, charging outrageous prices for doves to sacrifice, this was no longer a place of worship, this was now nothing but a den of thieves, I couldn't help myself, I had to make a stand, they had to be called out, so before I knew it I'd turned their tables over, called them what they were, a bunch of thieves and reminded them just what the place was, a temple, a place to worship God not a marketplace. Some then came to me for healing, I did what I could. The religious leaders were not so pleased to say the least, very angry in fact, that act probably sealed my fate. Got out of there before they could kick me out like that other time, that time I had read from Scripture and quoted from Isaiah – I have come to give sight, release captives, proclaim the year of God's favour, and suggested that reading was fulfilled in me. They nearly lynched me that day. Then I spent the next three years simply practicing exactly that.

I got out and went back to where I felt safe – back to my friends in Bethany which wasn't too far away.

Didn't sleep much that night. Guess I was a bit worried about what was in store. Had I ruffled too many feathers? Most of the crowd might have welcomed me, but I knew how fickle humans could be, with you one minute, baying for blood the next. They'd been trying to arrest me for a while, just couldn't find anything to stick. The mood was changing, Judas was changing, Peter was quieter than normal, something was brewing. I knew though I had to go back to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, I would make plans to do that with my friends in the next day or so.