

Festival Day

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church March 24th, 2024 – Mark 11:1-11)

Thanks to 'Z' today we have learnt a little bit about NowRuz, Persian New Year. We have heard what kind of festival and celebration it is, how families gather and share. We have learnt about the 7 symbols and their meaning.

These symbols all start with the same letter in Farsi, but I will speak of them in English and their meanings.



Samanu
wheat pudding



Sir
garlic



Senjed
lotus tree fruit



Serkeh
vinegar



Sumac
berry spice



Seeb
apple



Sabzeh
wheat grass

1. Sprouted wheat grass is a symbol of rebirth and growth.
2. Sweet wheat pudding is a symbol of power and strength.
3. Lotus tree fruit is a symbol of love.
4. Sumac, a berry spice is a symbol of sunrise.
5. Vinegar is a symbol of age and patience.
6. Apple is a symbol of beauty.
7. Garlic is a symbol of health and medicine.

Our bible reading today is also about a festival, a celebration. Many are going to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Passover, of course, celebrated the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt and slavery. It was a time that they celebrated one of their stories of the past, it is of course a story about freedom. Like our Persian friends, and indeed us, when we celebrate festivals like Christmas and Easter, families and friends would gather together. Like our celebrations Passover would have been marked by singing, prayer, dancing and feasting.

There would have been much anticipation and gladness amongst the crowd. This is what Jesus rides into. And as he rides in, he gets a right royal reception – garments thrown on the ground, branches ripped off the trees and waved in welcome. And he rides on a donkey, something we think of being an act of humility and it is, it is no great chariot, however it was also the mode of transport used by royalty.

No doubt some in the crowd, as they saw garments strewn on the road and waving tree branches they would have recalled the idea of how the Messiah would enter. So, they shout: *'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'* Not exactly saying Jesus is the Messiah but getting close.

And then Jesus, not surprisingly goes to the temple. Then returns to Bethany to his friend's house. And we are left to wonder what would come next.

Every Palm Sunday I wonder who was in the crowd. Who did they think Jesus was? Some no doubt thought he as a political leader, others a troublemaker, some a wonder worker, others a visionary. To some he was simply their teacher and friend. For some he was just the tradie from Nazareth. Some would have thought he was just getting too popular and needed to be silenced. And some would have thought he was indeed the Messiah for whom they waited and prayed. In the crowd there would have been a great variety of expectations of the one who they greeted with great applause, Jesus would have symbolised a variety of hopes and dreams of those who gathered around him.

I also find myself wondering what Jesus must have thought that day as he rode the colt and gazed at the many people in the crowd.

Did he go back to Bethany worried about what was happening, worried about some of the people he saw in the crowd, worried that it is so easy to get caught up in the hype of a crowd and then in the morning begin to think differently. Did he know the inevitable was just around the corner, that he had upset enough of them who would act and attempt to silence him once and for all in order to protect their lifestyle and status? Did he sense the mood changing? Did he sense something was brewing?

As we recall the story of Jesus, we are left hanging a bit. We don't really know what will happen next. Will the crowd continue to follow him, or will they change their mind? Who will have the final word in this story?

As we enter Holy Week, we will recall the rest of the story and ride the wave of emotions of Jesus in that fateful week? Will you join him in remembering all that happened that week?