

**Luke 21.1-49 20<sup>th</sup> March 2016 – start service with Elizabeth’s point of whatever is to hand**

There are so many voices in today’s readings – and lovely to hear several members of our St. John’s family doing it.

The voice of the crowds proclaiming ‘Hosanna!’

The voices of the characters in the Passion,

Of the High Priests crying ‘crucify’

Of Pilate asking ‘what is truth’

Of Jesus crying out ‘why have you forsaken me.’

The concept of voice, of speaking is a central Biblical theme.

It is through voice that God has communicated to the world

In Genesis God speaks creation into being,

God constantly speaks to those Biblical figures: Abraham in the desert, Moses in the burning bush and so many more,

God speaks to and through the prophets, calling Israel to repent, calling the people back into relationship with Him,

And above He speaks to the world in the person of Jesus, the incarnate Word.

In Jesus’ ministry we constantly see someone using his voice to restore broken hearts,

To call out hypocrisy

And to give voice to the voiceless.

More generally, to have a voice is to have identity, a sense of personhood.

It is a key concept in society, in our identities.

Denying someone their voice is to deny their sense of personhood.

If you've seen *The King's Speech* you may remember that powerful scene where the King, arguing with Dr. Lobe, cries out in frustration and anger 'I have a voice.;

In spite of his struggles, he has a right to be heard.

Perhaps one of the most difficult things about this period is not being able to hear one another's voices.

Yes, we are blessed with technology where we can pick up the phone or have video calls,

But it's not the same as to hear that voice coming from the person who is sat physically opposite you.

Communication is more than just the sounds of the voice box.

Jesus has a voice in the Palm Gospel – though as he enters Jerusalem, he never actually uses his voice.

Jerusalem is preparing to celebrate Passover,

That great feast of liberation, the story of God's salvation.

There is an atmosphere over the city, of excitement, of remembering.

And into this, comes one whose 'voice' is expressed through the power of metaphor and symbolism. His voice is one conveyed through the statement of entering the city on a donkey.

Jesus is deliberately echoing Zechariah chapter 9, which says 'your King comes riding on a donkey.' In this moment, Jesus is saying who he is and what he has come to do.

It is basically saying 'guess what? I'm back.'

Jesus' isn't the only one to do this.

Think of other such images we have: the new sheriff riding into town on a trusty steed,

The new King riding on armoured horseback into a conquered town.

And even in the Palm Gospel itself, there's this image of Jesus it being in direct contrast to what's happening on the other side of the city.

There's a book called *The Last Week* written by Marcus Borg and John Crossan.

In it, they suggest that as Jesus enters on a donkey in the East,

Pontius Pilate – the representative of Earth's greatest authority, Rome, enters on the West side in full military parade, ready to prevent uprising and disorder in the city.

Though from an unbiblical source, it is nevertheless a powerful image of the clash of Kingdoms that is at the heart of this week.

A clash of Kingdoms that is revealed fully in the Passion Gospel when Pilate and Jesus come face to face on Good Friday in Jesus' trial and Pilate, using the voice of authority of Rome, asks that timeless question 'what is truth?'

What is truth?

Never has a question voiced in scripture been so apt for our age, an age where objective truth no longer seems to exist,

Where people can say blatantly false things and still portray them as truth.

Despite asking Jesus that deeply rhetorical question, Pontius Pilate is a man who knows his truth. His truth is in his own power as prefect and ruler of Judea.

His truth is that his voice is law,

His voice has the power to rule, to instil fear, to manage order.

His truth is of a man certain of the power of his status, his voice.

But, the truth is: that the power that Pilate so naively believes he voices, is simply a power that is given to him.

The real power that Pilate gives voice to is that of Rome. His 'voice' is simply an echo of the human Emperor – he holds not real power of his own.

Stripped of his uniform, he would find himself voiceless.

So that showmanship entrance into Jerusalem on a war horse with full military might – methinks he doth protest too much.

Contrast this with the humility of Jesus riding on a colt, where instead of a military honour guard, he is greeted by ordinary folk waving palm branches: peaceful signs of triumph.

Here, we find voiced the truth of God's peace and humility, in comparison to Rome's of conquest.

Of course, Pilate doesn't understand this at all.

'What is truth?' Pilate voices.

It's right in front of him.

The truth is that this condemned prisoner before him possesses an authority and a status beyond any uniform, above any Emperor.

The truth is that the ultimate truth, the truth that has been enshrined in the very fabric of existence, stands before him, crowned not in jewels or fine clothing, but in an ironic royal robe with a crown of thorns and whose very flesh will be beaten and torn off by whips and chords.

Pilate is a man unable to grasp that deep truth before him.

Like all rulers of the world, his power is temporary and fleeting, and is shown up before this humble man.

For as Jesus is placed upon the cross, and the crowds, mocking, shout 'Hail, King of the Jews'

Little do they realise that they have given voice to the ultimate truth:

That here, upon these slabs of wood, is enthroned the ultimate King of the world.

And it is upon that cross that Jesus gives voice to the voiceless,

It is here that, to the endless cycle of death and destruction,

To the exploitation of the vulnerable and the disenfranchised,

Of all forms of human oppression God symbolically cries out 'no more.'

It is here that the love of God is voiced to the world: revealed not in power and might, but in the crown of thorns.

In the man who in Luke's Gospel cries out forgiveness to those who are nailing him to the tree.

This Holy Week, let us all be mindful of what our own voices are crying,

Right now, in the middle of the pandemic we may be crying 'why have you forsaken us,'

We might be like Pilate saying 'what is truth.'

But the answer is as true for us as it was for him:

It is stood right in front of you.

Jesus is standing right beside us.

And his voice is one of comfort, hope, peace and overwhelming love.

Amen.