

Familiarity Fatigue

- Ever met someone very familiar with whose changed - glasses, beard shaved off, even a haircut - but you can't place what has changed?
 - Crawford and his beard?!
 - familiarity hasn't so much bred contempt as dulled perception.
- Fear that is true of Palm Sunday, Triumphal Entry, ...
 - each year - story is familiar enough, but easy for its import to wash over us.
- This familiar story still has a call on us, asks us hard questions about our response to Jesus - so let's spend some time exploring...

Approaching Jerusalem with Jesus

- Political background:
 - subject nation, national feelings and identity, rulers preserving a fragile peace by dampening down overt opposition and thus retaining religious freedom.
 - sporadic rebel movements for decades, still simmering under the surface; ultimately Jewish rebellion in the late 60's and 70's, crushing Roman response. Masada...
 - Jesus approaching Jerusalem, capital city of subject nation at its main national festival - Passover, city packed with people.
 - Romans only garrisoned Jerusalem at Passover - crowd control more important than upsetting Jewish sensibilities.
- Volatile mix!
- Cap that with the following Jesus has been raising, the failed attempt to crown him king, and you have a potentially explosive situation!

Up from Jericho...on to Jerusalem

- Journey towards Jerusalem - Jericho, blind Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus...
- Probably a couple of days before Palm Sunday, Jesus and the disciples came up from Jericho:
 - climb of about 3,000ft (a Munro!) over 15 miles, in temperatures of around mid-50's Fahrenheit.
 - dinner given in Jesus' honour in Bethany - presumably stayed here the night (Jn.12)
 - then set off for Jerusalem - 2 or 3 fairly easy miles, collecting colt on way.
- Crowds of pilgrims - disciples would be just one more large group converging on the capital.
- Noise - colour - best clothes for the big city
- All here to celebrate Passover, singing, shouting out, perhaps Psalms of Ascent...
- I wonder how it started in Jesus' little group?
- Someone wondering aloud whether this Passover Jesus would prove himself Messiah?
- Someone else remembering some of the miracles - "do you remember when?"
- Excited buzz rippling through the small crowd.
- Breaks out into open praise:
 - "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"
 - "Peace in heaven and glory (hosanna) in the highest!"
- By his actions that day - riding into Jerusalem, on a colt (Zech 9:9), Jesus was asking questions of his disciples:
 - "who do you say I am?"
- Was he their king? Were they ready to acknowledge that publicly, not just in backwater Galilee, but here in the capital, with the Jewish rulers and the Roman troops watching?
 - were they also ready to accept that his way (donkey, not war horse)?
 - knocking on the head many of the political aspirations of his followers...

Shut them up!

- Jesus' actions provoked a reaction not only among his disciples...
- Pharisees travelling with disciples:
 - probably some who were sympathetic as well as the better known opponents
 - **Pharisees zealous for God** - would put most of us to shame!
(remember the political context!)
 - "Shut your disciples up, Jesus - they'll bring the Romans on our heads!"
- Of course, too, the recognition that Jesus acceptance of the disciples praise was an implicit claim to divine status that the Pharisees couldn't accept.
 - "Teacher (Rabbi), rebuke your disciples!"
- Jesus is asking them too the hard question:
 - **who do you say that I am? Just another Rabbi? Or are you prepared to humble yourselves and admit you've been wrong - and bow and worship me?**

And Jesus Wept

- As the praising crowd noisily makes its way forwards, the city itself comes into view. Jerusalem! City of God!
- Those high walls - the crowds of people - the rulers and the common folk.
- And Jesus wept...

Why?

- Because his whole life and ministry had asked: **"who do you say I am?"**
- And Jerusalem, and the majority of the Jewish nation, had said: **"Nobody!"**
 - turned their backs on only hope for peace, on the one person who could save.
- 40 years later Jerusalem was indeed sacked by the Romans as the Jews followed after their own kind of Messiah - one who ruled by the sword!
- **So Jesus wept** - for he saw what rejecting him meant:
 - both in the immediate future for the Jews of Palestine...
 - **and for each human being who turns away to an eternity separated from God.**

"Who do you say that I am?"

- Variety of responses to Jesus that Palm Sunday nearly 2000 years ago:
 - (i) **citizens of Jerusalem, indifferent, careless;**
 - (ii) **Pharisees on the road, with the followers of Jesus, but shocked and disturbed by his claims, unwilling to commit themselves, attracted but not convinced.**
 - (iii) **disciples, not fully understanding, at times downright clueless, but praising God for what they did know, and acknowledging Jesus as Lord and King.**

Where do you stand?

- Few of us here, I hope, are totally indifferent - we're at church after all!
- Perhaps you stand with the Pharisees - **drawn, but not convinced**, uneasy at some of the enthusiasm you see around you, not quite sure what to make of it!
- Jesus is still asking you **"who do you say that I am?"**
 - Good person? Fine example? Teacher? (David Holloway?!)
- none of those is enough! (CS Lewis, Alpha, mad/bad/God)
- **He is Lord, King, and God** - and to be worshipped, one to give our all to, unreservedly, totally, completely!
- Most of us are disciples - those who have committed ourselves to following Jesus.
- And all of us, like the disciples, have a long way to go in living for Jesus.
- And so Jesus still asks us:
 - **"who do you say that I am? Do you still live as if I was Lord? As if I was worthy of wholehearted, enthusiastic, ecstatic praise? Are you still prepared to stand up in the most intimidating of situations and say: 'I follow Jesus'?"**
- Will we begin again, especially this Holy Week as we remember all that Jesus did for us as he died and rose again, will we begin again to:
 - **"joyfully praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen?"**
- **Where will we stand this Palm Sunday?**

