

Introduction

- I guess you'll have heard it said that "a week is a long time in politics".
- Perhaps in our own day we know the truth of that better than ever, with the speed at which events can change the world in which we live, even just in the last few months:
 - Tsunami; 9/11; David Blunkett...

What has been the most important week in world history?

- a turning point in WW2: Dunkirk, Battle of Britain, Pearl Harbour, El Alamein, D-Day, or the dropping of a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima?
 - some great technological revolution: printing press, steam engine, telephone or electricity, anti-biotics, the wheel....
 - some far-reaching discovery: Columbus & America, that the world is not flat, nor even the centre of the universe...
 - a decision point: Luther and the Reformation, Emperor Constantine becoming a Christian...
 - or a busy week in an over-crowded provincial city that starts with a big parade and ends in a judicial execution that doesn't quite turn out as expected?
- No contest - the most important week in world history has got to be what we now call **Holy Week**, the last week of Jesus' earthly life leading up to his stupendous sacrifice on our behalf.
 - One of the disadvantages of the way we look at the Bible, in little manageable chunks, is that we can lose track of when things happened in relation to each other.
 - So going to take some time to "skim" our way through the last week of Jesus' life, looking not just at what happened, but also at the priorities Jesus adopted during that week

Jerusalem

- Remind of background on Jerusalem in Passover Week - cf morning service:
 - busy, bustly, like Edinburgh in the Festival only worse!
 - city population swollen 3 or 4 fold! Lack of water, lack of space, too much heat, too much noise, too much bustle...
- Religious fervour - God who saves out of Egypt (Passover) - and expectation that the outsider, Jesus, might just upset the religious apple-cart!
- All the way through, pay attention to the contrast between calm of Jesus and the turmoil of emotions around him, the focus & clear priorities of Jesus and the confusion around him.

Triumphal Entry

- Its into this heaving metropolis that Jesus comes over the hill, riding on his borrowed donkey...
 - not the way of power (white charger) but way of humility;
 - way of following God's prophecies and not doing it "My Way"
- We looked at this this morning...

Cleansing of the Temple

- Up to the Temple, centre of everything in Jerusalem, especially at Passover time:
 - that's why everyone is here, after all, for the sacrifice of the lambs...
- And Jesus upsets the tables of the money changers:
 - calls for real faith, not greed, in God's house;
 - get your priorities right, and God will provide; focus on the money and money will rule your heart!

Jesus' Authority Questioned

- Throughout the week Jesus was watched, almost hounded, by priests, Pharisees, Teachers of the Law - always there, asking questions, in the audience as Jesus taught, making sure he didn't say anything untoward!
 - (imagine the pressure that put on Jesus?)

- "By what authority are you doing these things?" (11:29)
 - aiming to trap Jesus, not really asking - two answers, God or self, blasphemy or irrelevance!
- Jesus' response (was John's baptism from heaven or from men?) wasn't just a clever trick, turning the tables neatly on them:
 - mostly forced them to ask themselves whether Jesus really was from God, a possibility they hadn't seriously considered
 - as I put it this morning, "who do you say I am....?"
- Jesus' priority wasn't to be superior, but to draw even the Pharisees towards faith in himself, to make them think...

Parable of the Tenants

- During the course of the week everyone is eager to hear what this religious rebel that everyone's talking about has to say for himself:
- Jesus tells parable of tenants:
 - vineyard, tenants, don't give profit (rent) to owner, kill his servants, and eventually his son hoping to inherit the property by default
- Doesn't need to say "I am the Son in the story...":
 - all the time (i) teaching that he has to die (disciples)
 - (ii) setting his face steadfastly to what lies ahead (himself)
 - and also (iii) continuing to challenge the religious leaders (outsiders)

Paying Taxes to Caesar

- Another testing question - meets with the same kind of response:
 - trick question designed to discredit Jesus;
 - answers neatly, but also asks them: are you really putting God first, rendering to God what is God's??

The Widow's Offering

- Then there was the widow's offering:
 - here the teaching was directed to the disciples, principally...
 - what was of value? money? generosity? external showiness? real faith?
- Turning upside down the values of everyone around him!

The End of the World

- Teaching about the end of the world - whole chapter of it!
 - be ready - what seems important in the world is comparatively unimportant - keep an eternal perspective!

Anointed with Perfume

- Anointed with perfume - very expensive, lavished on him.
- At centre of consternation - but what does Jesus see?
 - generosity, love for him expressed, "a beautiful thing!"
- The woman mattered to him, not merely the money she brought... what she felt, how she gave.

Conclusion

- What a week - and that is before the Last Supper and all Jesus' teaching there: washing disciples feet, instituting communion; before the betrayal by Judas, the arrest, denial by Peter, mock trial, crucifixion, resurrection!!!
- Quite a week!
- Familiar events - & that is good - but familiarity can dull perception:
 - I hope that we've simply been reminded how radically different the way of Jesus is from the way of the world;
 - encouraged to trust the one who remained calm in the face of all the hubbub;
 - challenged to choose the same priority as Jesus did: God first, always - and in particular the precious salvation he offers!
 - and alerted to how much we can learn, with heart as well as mind, in the week that lies ahead as we focus on all that Jesus has done for us.