

Palm Sunday

29th March 2015

Christ of the donkey and the cross. May I hold palm fronds and not nails.

I heard the cricket crowd shouting refrains last Saturday night. Now there was a night of action and drama!

The first Palm Sunday was also a day of action and drama.

We have tried to re-enact the day. The biblical account begins with Jesus and his friends coming over the hills from Jericho, via Bethphage and Bethany, to the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem – a journey of 36 kilometres and a climb of just over 1000 metres. Then we read that Jesus is riding a beast of burden, an untamed colt, an unpretentious and unprepossessing animal. Usually Jesus walked – in fact this is the only record of him travelling any other way. This day he entered the public arena to link with prophecies from the prophet Zechariah and with earlier historical events.

'On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives. Lo, your king comes to you. Triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey', wrote Zechariah.

The crowd all took off their cloaks and spread them on the dusty road, as had happened when centuries earlier King Jehu was enthroned.

The crowd tore branches from the trees to wave and made more cover on the road. That scene had happened when Simon Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem to be a Hasmonean high priest.

The chant was from Psalm 118, used in 165BC when the temple was re-cleansed by Judas Maccabaeus.

Each of these symbols was dramatic; full of historical memory and precedent – just as this Anzac day with the 100th commemorations we will be doing lots of remembering.

Who were in the crowd that day? Pilgrims from Galilee, perhaps some of the crowd from the city. Paving the way for Jesus with their clothes was an extravagant gesture. Such possessions were not readily misused. The action demonstrated their belief that here was someone to whom the best could be offered. By laying before him symbols of their own identity they were declaring a willingness to serve him with their lives.

Jesus left the noise and happy procession to look around the temple before going to a village to rest.

Another different crowd was manipulated later in the week to cry 'Crucify him'!

During Holy Week we recall other events in Jesus' last week of life. You have a small piece of writing to read every day from various onlookers. Clergy and licensed lay renew their vows at the cathedral and the oil we use for healing is blessed. On Thursday we remember the last day of Jesus until his arrest. We will eat together, wash each other's hands or feet and strip the church.

On Good Friday we meet here at 9:00 a.m. and gather with the Catholics and the Baptists at 9:30 to listen to Luke's account of the trial and death of Jesus.

We eat Hot Cross buns. On Saturday we decorate the church with Easter gardens and eggs, ready to celebrate the resurrected Jesus. You have a lily to cut out ready for Easter day. We are grateful if you can bring fresh flowers for the cross and perhaps your lily.

On Palm Sunday take a palm cross as a symbol of the great procession of welcome for Jesus, whose love for us took him to death on a cross.

Christ of the donkey and the cross; may I hold the palm fronds of joy, yet remember the nails of sacrifice.