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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : March 28th, 2021
“Palm Sunday”

PALM SUNDAY 2021

Occasionally I am asked what the Christmas and Easter festivals are like for a vicar. I often answer, slightly tongue in cheek, that most big services mainly involve crowd control! A bit flippant but there is also an element of truth in such an answer.

Crowd control must have been very much at the forefront of the minds of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem during the last week in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The crowds seemed to have turned out in their thousands to wave their palm branches and greet the King riding triumphantly into the city of that first Palm Sunday. But those crowds were probably quite easy to manage because they were mainly cheerful and buoyant. Their mood was quickly to change, though. Storming into the Temple and turning out the moneychangers and marketeers was never going to win Jesus many new friends in some quarters. Things possibly calmed down a bit as he taught people in the following days and as he celebrated Passover with his disciples. But then on the Friday – well things must have got much more tense and difficult to control. The same crowd who had cheered him on the previous Sunday were now baying for his death – and though Pilate made it plain that, in his opinion, Jesus had done nothing wrong, the crowds would have none of it; and so, because he feared the crowd, Pilate condemned Jesus to death – and no doubt his crucifixion was watched by those same crowds.

It would have been very difficult to stand up for Jesus that week – as Peter discovered as he was more or less forced to deny him three times to save his own skin. Even Judas Iscariot needed a crowd around him to carry out his act of betrayal. But Simon of Cyrene

carried the cross for him and Joseph of Arimathea ensured Jesus was buried – so there were some quiet acts of support for Jesus during that tumultuous week.

Crowds – we either love them or hate them. We either rush to join in or steer well clear. These past days we have seen protesting crowds on some of our streets, some with good reason to express their feelings and others there just to stir up trouble.

So, I suppose what I am pondering this morning is this – where do we stand with Jesus? Are we for him or against him or indifferently uncommitted? If we were there in Jerusalem in that first Holy Week, where would we have been? On whose side would we have been on? Of course, I know that we would all want to say that we would be shouting for Jesus and not against him. But faced with an angry crowd? Difficult then – and equally difficult today perhaps?

Faced with maybe not anger but people's indifference and apathy, are we nevertheless proud to say that we are a disciple of Christ today? Of course, we would be unwise to put ourselves at risk or danger – but there may be times when we have to decide to stand up for what we believe, for who we believe in – particularly in the workplace, at the school gate, amongst those who might challenge our faith, our belief.

To be honest, I have to say that I have always thought it is a good deal easier for those of us who wear clerical collars – people generally know where we stand and what we believe and who we follow. It is a great deal harder for those all those Christians who don't wear anything so obvious to show others where their faith lies. All most of us have to show that we are followers of Christ today is our demeanour, our inner calmness, our innate trust in God – as Jesus did as he walked along during the final days of his life on this earth. All we can do is to walk as faithfully as we humanly can with Jesus of Nazareth – and trust in God that others will see whose we are and respect our faith and belief as we hope and pray that something of what we believe might rub off onto them.

True and humble king, hailed by the crowd as Messiah: grant us the faith to know you and love you, that we may be found beside you on the way of the cross, which is the path to glory. Amen.