

While she attended university a young woman attended a Palm Sunday church service where they did the palm leaves thing; describing her experience she wrote, 'afterwards, while I was talking with a friend, an irate, elderly lady came up to me and told me I was dishonouring God in the way I held my palm. She went on to demonstrate the 'godly' way to hold the palm. This made no sense to me, for by that time, I was minimally aware that the crowds waved their palms, triumphantly and vigorously, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. I was taught that the Jews were celebrating their 'king.' Her telling off didn't make any sense to me then and it doesn't now.

We would never do thatwould we?

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

It was day after the Sabbath before Passover, I've been making the journey to Jerusalem for as long as I can remember, actually longer than I can remember; my parents brought me as a baby to celebrate the great Passover event in Jerusalem. I loved the singing and the significance of the Passover meal. I enjoyed meeting up with family and friends; and being able, when I was a boy, to escape my parents' close attention. Sure there was always the long journey home but somehow it was worth it. I especially remember the night when it was my turn to ask the question, 'why is this night different from all other nights.'

We came from a small village on the way to Nazareth, nothing much happened there, but we'd heard stories about a man who seemed to have miraculous powers and who spoke with authority about many things – I heard that he'd gathered quite a following; but I hadn't seen him and he hadn't been to our village.

The morning I'm talking about there was a huge commotion outside where we were staying on one of the streets that leads into the city from Bethany – many, many people – lots of dust and noise. Well when you're my age you're always looking for distractions.

I ran out onto the street below and couldn't believe what I was seeing. A huge crowd was gathered round something that was moving. There were all kinds of bizarre activities, some were singing, some were throwing their clothes on the ground some were cutting palm fronds and waving them.

Being relatively fit and strong, I pushed my way through the enthusiastic mob – there in the centre was a grown man sitting on what looked like a small or at least young donkey. In many respects it looked a bit absurd but who am I to say.

I tried to pick up what the words of the singers were. It was a bit muffled as you can imagine in a crowd of untrained singers. The constant seemed to be a word which I'd heard in other contexts, like when slaves were treated badly, crying out to their masters and, if they were really desperate, to God.

Hosanna.... Someone would sing out Hosanna to the son of David; another would respond, Hosanna in the highest heaven. Others joined in. And there were some quoting from what I think was one of the Psalms – one that I did catch was, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

They were heading somewhere – I wasn't sure but when I looked around and saw the Temple towering over the city I figured that must have been the place they were heading.

Who was he? Why were people being so strange? Weird! Why were they caught up in this way?

I was now being pushed by all and sundry - trying to work it out and walk at the same time. In desperation I cried out as loud as I could, 'Who is this?'

The gathered ones, lots of them cried out almost unanimously, **'THIS IS JESUS, THE PROPHET FROM NAZARETH!'**

They seemed to know, almost intuitively, who it was and I was simply there to catch up!

PAUSE

Who is this?

You maybe get some inkling:

- Hosanna is an acclamation when the king comes to town
- Throwing your clothes down is a gesture of honour to a famous person
- 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' is from what's called a Royal Psalm

Perhaps some thought Jesus had come to raise an army, run the Romans out of town and establish a new government.

But wait a minute – this 'king' rides a donkey, a fuzzy, lowly beast of burden – not a royal charger. He wears simple garments, not regal robes – no royal proclamations, no declaration of war; just an unarmed rabbi who bounces into town rather unstably I should imagine on the back of a young donkey.

Even the enthusiastic 'this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth' falls on deaf ears; after all they knew that nothing good could possibly come from Nazareth.

Who is this? This is a question for then, for the ages question and for today.

Matthew messes with messianic expectations of the day. The Jews thought they knew God, knew that God can do anything he wants – that God is all-powerful, strong, righteous and decisive.

Then God shows up – as a gentle, humble teacher on the back of a donkey; one who speaks more about love than power, who offers himself, not a programme, nor an agenda.

And on into the week Jesus went: he's rejected by the smart and the powerful, weeps over the fate of Jerusalem; breaks bread with the very disciples who will disappoint and betray him, is arrested and done away with in the cruelest way possible and even as he breathes his last he cries out, 'Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.'

They had no idea and often neither do we? In our more insightful moments we may see that Jesus is God with us, that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, that Jesus is the Lord of life; that indeed 'he is the Lord forever his truth shall reign.' And along with CT Studd we may even feel 'If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.'

In our less insightful moments we're as confused as the crowds in Jerusalem, avoiding his claims on our days; picking and choosing what we'll take from his life and his teaching.

So, today as we centre on how we may have responded if we were present in the crowd that day, let's reaffirm our commitment to him. You are the Christ, you are the Lord – and understand anew that through His Spirit in our lives we KNOW who he is!

