

PALM SUNDAY

The motor home has allowed us to put all the conveniences of home on wheels. A camper no longer needs to contend with sleeping in a sleeping bag, cooking over a fire, or hauling water from a stream. Now the camper can park a fully equipped home on a cement slab in the midst of a few pine trees and hook up to a water line, and electricity. One motor home I saw recently had a satellite dish attached on top. No more bother with dirt, no more smoke from the fire, no more drudgery of walking to the stream. Now it is possible

to go camping and never have to go outside. We buy a motor home with the hope of seeing new places, of getting out into the world. Yet we deck it out with the same furnishings as in our living room. Thus nothing really changes. We may drive to a new place, set ourselves in new surrounding, but the newness goes unnoticed, for we've only carried along our old setting.

The adventure of new life in Christ begins when the comfortable patterns of the old life are left behind.

To truly see Jesus and his truth means more than observing what he did or said, it means a change of identity. We don't always see the potential in the things and the people around us. We can be blind to what really matters. When Jesus was living on earth, travelling around teaching and healing, people did not understand who he really was. Some thought he was special, perhaps even a great prophet. But to others he was just a carpenter from Nazareth. For most of the time it was as if he was in disguise. And Jesus did nothing to discourage that. For most of his public

ministry our Lord veiled his full identity. He played down the miracles and the extraordinary happenings. How often do we read of Jesus ministering in an extraordinary way and then disappearing into the crowd or retreating to a lonely place? Jesus shunned popularity in the interest of a greater purpose. He wanted people to hear the good news that the creator God really cares for humankind. He desired everyone to know God's love and the offer of forgiveness and cleansing that is at its heart. He passionately proclaimed a new experience of spiritual

life that would transform people and their understanding of the world and their neighbour. He wished everyone to realise that the best part of life was still to come, so that people would be filled with hope. And to emphasise all these important things Jesus got himself involved with people's lives at an ordinary level. He became one of us and in his early ministry he did not disclose his full nature so as not to distance himself from those who knew they were spiritually dirty. In Philippians 2 Paul comments; "Jesus made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a

servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!”

Only after Easter did those with eyes to see and hearts to believe come to have a right view of Jesus. The veil of obscurity was only really cast off at that stage. Today we remember the celebrations as Jesus entered the Holy City. That was the point when the veil of obscurity began to lift; people could now see their king and worship. Each of the four Gospels tell the story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem but

they all tell it in slightly different ways. Matthew draws attention to the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy as the principle theme. Luke suggests that the scene was self-evident. If the disciples were too dim to understand then the stones would declare the truth. John emphasises the mystery of it all; the full truth would only be discovered later. And then we have Mark, in the passage we've looked at this morning. Mark is more direct than the others. He tells us about the donkey, the colt. The donkey was an honoured beast in Palestine. Kings rode to war on a

horse but returned victorious on a donkey. The donkey was not a lowly beast, second best to a stallion, it was the best. Here came a returning king, arriving with authority and power. The disciples' obedience, the friends' loaning of the animal, the clothes and branches on the path, the shouting crowd, all indicate respect and honour due to a kingly person. People's anticipation of something special was rewarded. They were not let down. And the people gathered in Jerusalem were not let down as their Messiah rode in on the donkey. He was fulfilling the Old

Testament prophecy of Zechariah;
“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your
king comes to you, righteous and having
salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Their
liberator was coming; the one who would
bring material prosperity, the one who
would exercise political clout as the
powerful Messiah King to break the
Roman power. That’s why they shouted
‘Hosanna!’ Hosanna means “save now”.
The crowds were full of expectation that
the end of tyranny and oppression was at

hand and that the Messiah would be able to topple the Roman aggressor now. We can sing 'Hosanna' this morning and really mean it, but in a different way from the crowds that day. Jesus was about liberation but not in the way that the crowds imagined it. He was setting up a kingdom, but not an earthly kingdom. Courageously he turned their idea of political power and military might on its head. Jesus did not reach out for political leadership because he knew that the root of the problem was not political; instead it was the human heart. He came to

challenge and reverse the human idea that right structures will produce good people. That's a fallacy of government that never works. The truth is that people are sinfully selfish and it's only when sin is faced up to and dealt with that there is hope. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to signify that he wished to establish a rule of love, respect and honesty in people's lives and the people missed the point. We too can miss the point this morning. We can believe in the Jesus that best fits our expectations and forget about the rest. For example, our

Jesus can be meek and mild but not strong and opinionated. He can be inoffensive and gentle, but not decisive and suffering, and before we know where we are, we are following a Jesus made in our own image. The crowds allowed themselves to be deceived that great day when Jesus came into Jerusalem. Yes, it was right that they cheered and waved their palm branches and made a great fuss about him. That was appropriate, but their motives weren't. They wanted the wrong things from their Messiah king and they would be very disappointed. If we want worldly

riches and success in our lives we can look to Jesus too. We can say how much he has blessed us materially and we can believe that that shows he loves us. But I think we're deceiving ourselves if we believe that. Jesus came to Jerusalem to die. He came to lose his life, not to gain power. Palm Sunday challenges us about our motives. It forces us to look at our attitudes and our assumptions and it makes us think again. What is it that we see in Jesus arriving on a donkey? The Easter events give us the answer to that kind of

question. And we'll be looking closely at
that towards the end of this week.