

## **PALM SUNDAY - Isaiah 50.4-9a, Matthew 22.1-11**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher” – with both parents and my wife being teachers, I can’t help thinking I have often been on the receiving end of the tongue of a teacher. “That I may know how to sustain the weary with a word”. I think that is a lovely phrase, and a good teacher, who can sustain, encourage, educate – a good teacher is wonderful. We remember those who have taught us, and we give thanks to God for them.

My dad used to teach what we used to called “backward” children – he had a class in a Cambridgeshire Primary School, and sometimes he would gain some extra children when the gipsies were in the area. I remember going for a Sunday afternoon walk with him, and we went past the encampment. We were invited in, made very welcome – he was their lad’s teacher, and they were grateful. “That’s why I’m a teacher”, said dad - and I was very proud of my dad.

This weekend Julie and I should have been at Selwyn College in Cambridge, for our fortieth anniversary reunion - that’s a lie, it can’t really be forty years. We would have dined with some very clever people, and we will remember the very clever people who did their best to teach us. I will never forget Professor Sotddart who taught Geomorphology, Dr Robin Glasscock who taught historical geography (I remember him as a young man, but apparently he retired in 2001), Canon John Sweet (New Testament), Morna Hooker (St Paul) - and the list goes on and on.

I wonder what sort of teacher Isaiah was. A preacher, someone who would stand and proclaim, or a teacher who sat down with others and helped explain to them what God had told him about the Messiah. Or a bit of both? A teacher needs to be taught – needs to spend time learning, and God has spoken to Isaiah. “Morning by morning he wakens, wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.”

The prophet speaks about the servant, the suffering servant, the one God is sending – the Messiah, the messenger. We know he is Jesus, Isaiah (obviously) did not. This person was spoken to by God, this person listened to God, and did as God wanted. “I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.” I cannot think of anything worse than having my beard pulled out – but of course we know a little about torture, we’ve read the history, we know what men are capable of doing to other men – the world is a hideous place for so many.

So often I struggle to believe God is with me, struggle to see the point of it all, struggle to make sense of all that people go through in this world. I know I am not the only one. I suggest our text for life should be the last verse of the Isaiah reading (and the complete verse, not just half of verse 9),

It is the Lord GOD who helps me;  
who will declare me guilty?  
All of them will wear out like a garment;  
the moth will eat them up.

That last verse is an amazing phrase – “the moth will eat them up”. I went to a lovely exhibition at the National Maritime Museum a few years ago, all about Samuel Pepys. It included court costumes of the seventeenth century, beautiful clothes 350 years old – no moth there. But most of us don’t take that much care of our clothes – the moth will get my cassock, and I must get some new clerical shirts before they wear out. God and his love last longer than anything. We need to hang on to that at the moment.

So Jesus enters Jerusalem. He is a teacher, he is a healer, he is a prophet, he is a friend – last week we read about his friendship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He has twelve friends in his disciples, and asks two of them to go and get a colt. I wonder what they thought he was up to. “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.”

They have seen him at work, they know enough of Jesus, if he tells them to get a colt – they’ll go and get a colt. If the colt misbehaves, pulls in the wrong direction, they’ll cope. If the owner wants to know why they are walking off with his colt – they’ll tell him what Jesus said, and it will be fine. Because, when Jesus plans something, that is what happens. They recognise his authority, his power, that he is something, someone, special.

He enters Jerusalem – they knew he is special. They are not stupid. They know this is what a Messiah will do, they know he must enter his city, though they probably didn’t expect him to do it on a colt.

Were they intrigued, surprised, unsure, excited, or frightened? They were used to huge crowds – but a huge crowd at the city gate, that’s probably more frightening than a huge crowd in a desert. They were used to opposition – but the Jewish authorities backed up with Roman soldiers, that’s probably more frightening than what had ever happened before.

I suspect that they knew everything was coming to a climax, that this was a week like nothing they had experienced before. The world, their world, would never be the same again. We know how the story of Holy Week ends - with a resurrection and an empty tomb. Those disciples did not.

Yet this year, we can understand the disciples' fear more than we usually can. This Holy Week will be nothing like those which we have experienced in years gone by. All the stability, the normality, the journey of faith we make together - this year, not possible.

Well, take inspiration from a teacher.

At the beginning of the week I had an email from Hannah, one of the teachers at Walter Evans School and subject leader for Religious Education. Could I put together a video message for the children, something they can put on the school's youtube channel? An Easter Message in these difficult times.

My heart sank. I can take photos on my phone, and I shot a video - once. Julie and I had to produce a video about the Derwent Valley for our MA. It was the assignment we failed. Kathleen, our University teacher, was not impressed. My kids thought it was hilarious, and offered all kinds of useful advice (you know the sort). I decided if I was doing a school assembly, I'd start with some images and talk about them. I found images of the Bridge Chapel in Derby - have a look at my blog <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2018/03/03/derby-chapel-of-st-mary-on-the-bridge/>. Then I realised there was no way I could film me, and film the images at the same time. So I filmed me, and spent an hour working out how to email the file to Hannah at school. I sent her a separate file of the images, and said I can't put them together. "Nor can I" she said, "but Elliot, the school's IT man, can." If one teacher can't sort it, two of them working together can.

The video is now on the internet -

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lb\\_W7aL9BgM&t=87s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lb_W7aL9BgM&t=87s)

and I'm quite chuffed with it. I tweeted about it, and Kathleen, our former University tutor, told me how great it was - so I've managed to get an Easter message to her and her family. The video has been watched 156 times so far, which is worth a thought - one teacher, not someone who regularly worships here, decided her pupils would benefit from an Easter Message, encouraged me to make it, helped me sort it, and it's done a little bit to build the Kingdom of God. There's an Easter lesson there for all of us.

Peter Barham, 4 April 2020

