



SUNDAY 2 APRIL 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Palm Sunday (A): Matthew

Crowd scenes carry many messages. Some are glaringly obvious and they have to be. Placard - carrying demonstrators who've filled our news screens and headlines know there's power in numbers and support for each other. They're out to preach and persuade.

Whether their insistent message creates leverage with decision makers or not may well depend upon how their clarion calls are interpreted by other forces with clout, be they political parties or media networks, all wanting to tell us how to think. Special pleading turns heads and minds, creates different world views and hopes we'll swell their numbers. But it's never simple. Well intentioned campaigners can be joined by others with disruptive and destructive intent.

Jesus was welcomed by the crowd when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. The deliberate parody of the conquering hero on an imposing stallion may not have been appreciated by all in the cheering groups but no matter, subtleties get lost in the energy generated in crowds. Infectious enthusiasm for a cause can lead to tearing down palm branches or throwing your coat down to claim a stake in the welcome. Someone starts something. Soon it can be trending.

Be deliberate intention crowds can be motivated and manipulated. Jesus' welcoming parties became those who called for his brutal death and the early release of a dangerous criminal. We can all be carried away by a groundswell of emotion and collude with what on a good day we'd avoid. Football crowds, pop festivals and various public marches all need careful policing to ensure safety. But chanting can shift behaviors, distort our best judgements and lead us susceptible to wrong-headed activity. To see how fickle we can be we only have to look at how we've been affected by advertising.

Our entrance into Holy Week should learn from Jesus and choose some silence to consider and weigh up how and who we are in this story. We're surrounded by hyped messages and need the stillness of contemplation to find our feet and make a personal response. Following the Lord faithfully will inevitably mean carrying crosses. Resisting injustice and lies means we'll be opposed by those with other interests - and who may also have succumbed to views with consequences beyond expediency.

Creating and building God's Kingdom on the earth involves sacrifice and suffering. Human life and all creation is sacred, not to be plundered or maltreated. Our task, yours and mine, is in prayerfully choosing to differ when life is diminished by vested interests alien to the Gospel. Our crowd preaches love. This week is its story.



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— ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP —

Pope Francis on Christian Joy

Christian joy is usually accompanied by a sense of humour. We see this clearly, for example, in Saint Thomas More, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Philip Neri. Ill humour is no sign of holiness. “Remove vexation from your mind” (*Ecclesiastes 11:10*). We receive so much from the Lord (*1 Timothy 6:17*), that sadness can be a sign of ingratitude. We can get so caught up in ourselves that we are unable to recognize God’s gifts.

With the love of the Father, God tells us, “My son, treat yourself well Do not deprive yourself of a happy day (*Sirach 14:11.14*) he wants us to be positive, grateful and uncomplicated: “In the day of prosperity, be joyful... God created human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes” (*Ecclesiastes 7: 14.29*). Whatever the case, we should remain resilient and imitate Saint Paul: “I have learnt to be content with what I have” (*Philippians 4:11*). Saint Francis of Assisi lived by this; he could be overwhelmed with gratitude before a piece of hard bread, or joyfully praise God simply for the breeze that caressed his face.

- Rejoice and Be Glad—Paras 126 and 127