



SUNDAY 5 APRIL 2020

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 21: 1-11

Early in May last year an endearing story hit local and national newsstands—a baby donkey had been born at the amazing stables of Kynren, our north east's night time outdoor spectacular Tale of England. Pictures travelled far and wide. By the time I saw the donkey for myself it had celebrity status. Young animals, and even more, our own babies have great pulling power.

Donkeys don't come high in the beauty leagues. Compare them to the elegance of racing thoroughbreds and, frankly, the comparison is simply unfair. Used for centuries as beasts of burden, stoically carrying loads impossible for humans, donkeys have been worked hard, been often maltreated and their average lifespan of 25-30 years usually halved for working donkeys in poorer countries.

The language of devotion tells us that Jesus entered in triumph into Jerusalem. He was riding on a donkey.

This contrasts with the trappings of power and authority of Roman victorious generals. Mounted aloft on superb stallions they left no one in any doubt who was in charge as they entered any city. The signals of high office were very much in your face. Our Son of Man, as he called himself, showed a God soaked in working class values, entering his city at face height to die for its people and to rise among them again. It re-writes the language of power and status. It's a message that only makes sense in love.

The ordinary folk recognised this - they went quite wild. Ripping down palm branches and throwing their coats in his path hardly suggests disinterest. They understood, but in the way crowds understand, floating on a tide of enthusiasm, certainly infectious but short-lived when other winds blow.

Jesus entered a Jerusalem thick with unsubtle alliances, political intrigue and manipulation. It wouldn't be long before the crowd changed its colours, driven by currents of fear and ignorance. Our God is no stranger to the complexities of human allegiance, brought about by self interest and, in the name of religion, supported by defensive careerists.

It's tempting to think of ourselves as onlookers, spectators ready to comment. But if we more accurately see ourselves as participants, we may identify enthusiasms soon ousted by new interests and criticism and learn something about our personal choices; we can fluctuate as madly as the weather. Our faith habits may or may not provide a reliable scaffolding to support us through changing times.

Palms this weekend may be harder to come by, but many make these symbols of victory into crosses as a telling reminder of a God who sees us as sheep without a shepherd, puts himself on the line for us and risks always being ready patiently to teach us at some length. Our God travels light, so does our Pope, replacing posh limousines for the back seat of a Ford Focus - don't miss the signals here.

Donkey travel is slow. In these restricted housebound times, try to relax your pace and reflect on the one who comes in the name of the Lord. And please keep safe. We're all deeply loved.



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

A Coronavirus Prayer

Loving and healing God, we turn to you in prayer, confident that you are with us and with all people in every moment. We stand before you as a people of hope, trusting in your care and protection. May your faithful love support us and soothe the anxiety of our hearts.

Generous God, fill us with compassion and concern for others, young and old, that we may look after one another in these challenging days. Bring healing to those who are sick and all who work in our medical facilities.

Give wisdom to leaders in healthcare and governance that they may make the right decisions for the well-being of people. We pray in gratitude for all those in our country who will continue to work in the days ahead in so many fields of life for the sake of us all. Bless them and keep them safe.

O God of creation and life, we place ourselves in your protection. May the mantle of your peace enfold us this day and tomorrow.

May all the saints of God, pray for us. Amen