

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 13th July 2008

Being Witnesses with Jesus – on the procession

John 12:12-36

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Here, in this familiar Palm Sunday reading we see the contrast of the crowd shouting Hosanna to the King and Jesus (many of the same crowd who will later shout "Crucify Him") and the servant King entering on a colt, a donkey, as was prophesied in the old testament in Zechariah 9. Jesus knows only too well where this journey will take Him... As you read through John's gospel describing Jesus going about His life and Ministry, people are making their minds up, casting their verdict on whether or not He really is the Son of God, deciding on what they truly believe about Him. It seems here that following the raising of Lazarus in particular, many have come to see Jesus for themselves. It is clear too that the Pharisees are getting frustrated...see verse 19. Jesus is gathering more followers as people are drawn to Him and come to believe that He really is the Son of God.

As you and I witness – people will make their minds up about Jesus. Here, the disciples and many of the new followers still do not grasp why it is necessary for Jesus to have to go through death. They are here to hail Him as King and yet this King is one who will die the most terrible death at the supposed command of human beings in certain positions of power. But God will allow this – look ahead to verse 27, following our reading. God will allow Jesus to suffer in order to glorify His name. And look back with me to verse 23 and 24. Jesus analogy with the grain of wheat is helpful. **For God's purpose, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in suffering such a death is to bring that which God has created back to himself.** In other words God's whole heartfelt attitude, drive and purpose is to rescue us, to bring us back to Him. For He knew us before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1) and His purpose in our being created was that we should love as He has loved us. God made you and I out of His love – we are in essence an expression of God's love... and God Himself will die, like a grain of wheat in order to produce many more seeds. We are to be the fruit of God's love. God's people are to be restored into the life of the Spirit, into relationship with the God head – Father Son and Holy Spirit. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life" in other words shall have life with, in and through God. The hope and purpose of Jesus death was that all should believe. Not some or a few, but all. **"I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds".**

It is incumbent upon us who believe to be witnesses to this love. In the early Church followers of Jesus are out and about – not sitting in a Holy huddle. They are on the street, rubbing alongside those who don't believe, later in Acts 4 we see they are making a difference -- in their witness and attitude towards their possessions, their care for one another, their proclamation of the gospel message and most importantly their daily acts of worship. This it seems drew others to Christ and there numbers were added to daily...Paul, in 1 Cor 12, makes the point that the Church is not a building, not somewhere we go to on Sundays – but the very body of Christ. In v. 12 and again in v.27 he does not say the Church is like a body. Paul says that **the Church is the body of Christ – the visible expression of Jesus.** Michael Green says this about the Church, 'The only Christ men and women see is his people'. All churches should be devoted to the ideal of every-member ministry and therefore witness.

This term we have been thinking about being witnesses with Jesus. To do this we must be with Him, not only on a Sunday or in our small group, if we are in one, but every day, when we wake, when we walk into town, or go to work, or go on holiday or go to school, or eat with friends... **Witness is about being with Jesus – seeing what God is doing and joining in.** We are not called to make waves but to ride the waves that Jesus is making. You and I are called to be in this world, to get out and about. Join a club, play football, give time to the School PTA, go on a course to learn French or whatever. I believe that Jesus is calling us to go to places where He is. That too includes the poor – those who are marginalised or isolated. In Dorking some of us live in streets where there is a clear divide from one side of the road to the other, a social divide, or a financial divide. We are called to cross the road and make a difference whatever side we live on, to build relationships whichever side of the road we are on, to serve and to give and in doing so we will find that God is doing a work in our lives and that we truly are being blessed ourselves. We must ask ourselves the question **"How committed are we to really being a witness to Jesus?"** To do this we must begin with worship – that is the very core of our expression of love for Christ and we must never get into a church culture of simply doing good works – no our behaviour must flow out from our worship. Then we must endeavour to understand His word, that is the bible and Jesus Himself and we are to be witnesses to the word, that is Jesus. **It is in our being with Him that our doing (or actions) become an expression of Jesus Himself.** **"Whoever serves me must follow me and where I am my servant will be also".** **The way we give to other people should be the way we would like to receive ourselves** which stems directly from the second commandment, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

If our Christian living is true to Christ it will inevitably lead to good works - not because we can earn our salvation, but because we cannot love Jesus without sharing his love and compassion for those in need. And that is witness. Jesus spent much of His time on earth amongst the poor and needy. Our challenge and call is to follow Jesus. To be in the places where He is. Are we up for it? The key verse in this passage for us is verse 26...



Witness: questions to discuss

1/ William temple wrote this “The Church is the only co-operative society that exists for the benefit of its non-members’. Do you agree? How does this challenge your lifestyle and how should “being Church” be expressed if we agree with Temple’s statement?

2/ In John’s first letter we find this, ‘ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?’ Read Acts 4 v 32-35. Does the Church in Dorking reflect this model?

3/ How many of us have meaningful relationships with non-believing friends? Discuss what proportion of your time is spent in Church related activity with believers and how much is spent out in the world. What difference would it make to your life balance or group if the people you witness to came to faith?

4/ Do you think there is a social divide in the Dorking area? How easy is it to cross the street? Discuss the Besom and pray about whether you could offer time, skills or things.

5/ Read the introduction and poem below. Be still and spend time reflecting, sharing your feelings and thoughts and most importantly – praying...

There is a true story of a country Vicar who was approached by a homeless woman asking him to help her. Doubtless, when he responded, with absolute sincerity, that he could only pray for her, it was because he felt helpless in that situation. Many of us will know that feeling. He was right to offer to pray for her. It is always right to pray. The woman went away and was still homeless.

Sometime later that same woman wrote this poem and handed it in to a Regional officer at the charity, Shelter, which has done so much to help the homeless

‘I was hungry, and you formed a humanities group to discuss my hunger.
I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release.
I was naked, and in your mind you debated the morality of my experience.
I was sick, and you knelt down and thanked God for your health.
I was homeless, and you left me alone to pray for me.
You seem so holy, so close to God,
but I am still very hungry – and lonely - and cold’.