

*God of Courage, give us wisdom, that we may sustain the weary with our words.  
As we speak, help us also to listen. Amen.*

## **Matthew 21: 1-11**

### ***A triumph for whom – the crowds or God?***

Now we are moving into the last week of Lent. As we read, Matthew reports a significant event, namely Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem. It was five days before his crucifixion. What are your impressions of this passage? The loud hosanna, Jesus' humble but the kingly arrival on a donkey together with the turmoil look very impressive. Indeed, the crowds seem to greet their coming king greatly. But questions arise – how did they know Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David? And what did they expect from him? Based on these questions, we'll briefly think about what the crowds might have anticipated from Jesus as the coming king/Messiah. Next, What made Jesus become the Passover lamb of God? Lastly, we'll think about our Lenten journey with this suffering servant king.

#### ***1) Jesus as Messiah for the crowds***

The crowd(s)<sup>1</sup> who appear in gospels are very interesting. Although they don't seem to act or speak purposely, their deeds and words often play significant roles in unfolding events in certain circumstances. In Jesus ministry, the crowds often follow Jesus from Galilee.<sup>2</sup> They even witness the Sermon on the Mount when it is addressed to the disciples.<sup>3</sup> According to Mark 6:34 (and Matt 9:36), Jesus was seized by compassion when he saw the people/the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The leaders and teachers of the people often thought that Jesus was leading the people astray.<sup>4</sup> In general, however, the crowd is the anonymous background to Jesus' ministry.<sup>5</sup>

The crowds are often double-mindedness. On the one hand, they provide for Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. On the other hand, they are incited to demand his crucifixion.<sup>6</sup> In Matt 14:5 (and 21:26; Mark 12:12, etc.), the crowd also stands in opposition to its leaders.

With this information, if we reread the passage, we can't help but think that the crowds seem to behave according to their needs and feelings. Throughout Jesus' ministry, they had observed how Jesus healed people, made the blind see and the lame walk, fed five thousand in the wilderness and raised the dead. So when the city asked a question, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered: "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee' (21:11). It is what they portrayed who Jesus was based on their observation and experiences at that time.

They may have seen the better future from Jesus, who would save them from the present miserable life conditions under the Roman Empire. As in the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9,<sup>7</sup> This prophet from Nazareth even rode a donkey to enter Jerusalem. They welcomed him who seemed to fulfil the prophecy. When they saw Jesus was entering Jerusalem, they might have thought that finally, the day had come to an end, their toils and sufferings. They spread their clothes on the road, cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. These were the expression of recognition, loyalty and promise of support. Carrying palm branches also expressed victory and success.<sup>8</sup>

Yet it also shows us what's in their hearts. They wanted a king/messiah who could resolve life issues so that they could live better. They saw him only through their yearnings and wishes based on their

---

<sup>1</sup> ὄχλος, οὐ, ὁ ochlos people, crowd, (large) masses, throng

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:25

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:1; 7:28

<sup>4</sup> John 7:12b, 20, 32, 43, 49

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 13:2; 14:23; 15:10; John 11:42, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 27:15, 20, 24

<sup>7</sup> Zechariah 9:9 - The Coming Ruler of God's People. Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7; and Revelation 7:9.

understanding of a messiah. But for Jesus, he didn't come to be a king that people wanted to see. He came to become the Passover lamb of God.

## **2) *Jesus as the Passover lamb of God***

Jesus, as the Passover lamb of God is revealed in Matt. 16:21. It was after Peter acknowledged that Jesus was Messiah, the Son of the living God.<sup>9</sup> It reads, "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." In this short verse, Matthew didn't waste a word but reveal what was going to happen in the end. When Peter heard Jesus' passion remarks, his response only showed his limited understanding of Messiah as did the crowds. Peter took Jesus aside and even rebuked him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."<sup>10</sup> Peter, together with others – the crowds, the elders and chief priests and scribes, simply saw Jesus through their needs or their perspectives. For the elders, chief priests and scribes, Jesus was the greatest threat to their established order of life. For others, he was a person who would save them by giving them food, identity, healings, and freedom from the empire. But for Jesus, he came to replace the existing temple in Jerusalem with the new and eternal one.

The temple in Jerusalem had been the medium between the people in Israel and God. Passover lamb was sacrificed every year to remember the day when God saved them from death in Egypt. But as time went by, the temple had been losing its purpose by human greed and the corrupted temple system. Gradually, people forgot about who God was. As Passover was coming close, Jesus knew that he was going to be the sacrificial lamb once for all which was acceptable to God.<sup>11</sup> Even for us, it is a mystery of which we may not be able to fathom the depth of the love of God. How the Son of God became the sacrifice to cancel the sin of the world once for all? Any logic or reasoning is not possible to explain it. We understand it only through our faith in Christ which we received by grace. In the end, Jesus' entry to Jerusalem was a triumph for God, not a triumph for the crowds, or the others who crucified him.

## **3) *Our Lenten journey with the Suffering king***

We can see a contrast between the perspectives of the crowds and Jesus' in Matthew's story. The crowds didn't get what they wanted from this promised king. Instead, they were about to encounter a shameful, powerless and criminal like a king. Besides, he will end up on the cross. Similar to what happened to the happy prince who lost all his gems and gold, the crowds couldn't stand seeing with this powerless and shameful king any longer. But this suffering king was in the centre of this whole mystery in salvation. In Romans 5:18, the apostle Paul aptly summarized the whole purpose of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem. It reads, "Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all." Explaining such a theologically packed statement in a few words is not possible, but only through analogies. We sow a seed to get the same kind of seeds in the harvest. Jesus' entry to Jerusalem is an act of planting a new seed by replacing the old temple that had lost its purpose. This new seed was about to fulfil the law once for all.

Whether the crowds understood Jesus rightly or not, in the end, their shouting for hosanna and Messiah proved right. It was not through people' way, but God's. Likewise, the Happy Prince became happy, indeed when the love for his people was accomplished by the Swallow. So what do these stories teach us in this Lenten journey? Where are you standing in Matthew's account? Are we cheering Jesus or jeering at him? May God allow us to meditate on these questions humbly. Amen.

---

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 16:15 - He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (16) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 16:22

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 12:3