

A Journey in unprecedented times?

What if this was a news report like we are seeing on our televisions and phones? With a reporter stood on the side of the procession, watching the moment that Jesus approaches the city gates?

Would they report this moment as unprecedented times too?

A journey that Jesus had told His disciples that he would take. Telling them what was to come. A King that would have to go away to be anointed and servants that must trust in this time and continue to wisely and joyfully share the good news.

With these words ringing in His followers ears He rides humbly and yet triumphantly into the to city. Walking towards a throne and a Kingdom that is different to the world. The crowds proclaim His majesty and want to get close to him and to touch him. This miracle worker, this man who they say is the son of God. They recognise him and He in turn accepts this title. Right under their noses of the power and authorities of the time. These were truly unprecedented times that were being travelled.

When we travel through unusual experiences, we tend to remember details. As our brains rush to make sense of them. If events are traumatic or joyous, the intensity of the situation makes us notice every minute detail, as we process them. This time is one of those moments for this generation. We too are moving through what feels like unprecedented times at the moment

Each one of us is trying to come to terms with what we are experiencing. As we have been forced to slow down, and a time that feels long and protracted for some. Or we have been asked to go towards a place of exposure and fear, as we serve our communities. And a time of grief, anxiety, uncertainty and sadness for many.

I wonder if this is a moment to see the truth anew, and what God wants to show us.

Have you noticed, the way we are now united, and the new ways that we hear each other? Have you noticed the way we walk and have had to slow down, which has led to a new perspective of our surroundings? Things look more beautiful and in focus, nature looks

so glorious and sounds so wonderful. Everything so much more detailed than we remember. What does God want you to notice in this time? What is it today for us to see, as Jesus journeys into Jerusalem? What are you to notice in another unprecedented time?

Is it to see the splendour and knowing of Jesus? I wonder if you pause to look at this majesty in detail, will it change you for these times?

We choose to follow the King of Kings. A King that walks, knowing exactly where He is going and who He is. A King, who walks right into the heart of the city and the seat of earthly rule to challenge the religious power and injustice. To challenge the ways that people were serving themselves and not God. A King that walks into the place that will bring danger to himself. A King who comes to claim His throne and who knew He would be rejected by His generation. Yet a King that walks with total confidence in His calling and in His father's love.

As we walk through this time, we too can do so, knowing that we walk in this same confidence. We also, and importantly, travel hopefully into places of concern, to speak Justice and love, looking at ourselves for the first changes to be made.

Notice too that we walk with a King who knew what He was doing and where He was going. The King sent two disciples out to get the colt, which was an unriden donkey, and proclaims a King, the promised one, coming into a city! They were sent ahead to the village to ask with confidence for the Donkey for the Lord, which was prepared.

Zechariah foretold that this would happen:

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your King comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey*

Also see the King travels the route from the Mount of Olives, which was a place people knew as a Gods holy Judgement upon them. He arrives to shouts of acclamation and praise, taken from Psalm 118. "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" Jesus the King does not deny this but accepts this.

We are to notice that **this** King walks into the city with humility
And not with military power and might
We are to notice that **this** King will not overthrow with force
But a King that stops for the fallen weak and helps them up.
We are to notice that **this** King is confrontational
With a political heavenly agenda of equity.
We are to notice that **this** King walks at the pace of the slowest person
And does not judge selfishly.
We are to notice that **this** King touches the dirty and outcasts
And cleanses them, restores them and loves them.
We are to notice that **this** King was asked to stop people praising him
And demonstrates that all of creation will praise him.

Before His entry to Jerusalem, Jesus had told His followers about a King that would go away to be anointed and whilst away His servants were to serve wisely and fruitfully, trusted to share. Then on the Kings return they will be trusted with so much more. With this ringing in the disciple's ears, Jesus takes His followers into the city gate towards His heavenly throne in a truly public declaration fulfilling prophecy.

I wonder if we are to notice and then accept what our role is in these unprecedented times.... The crowd, the followers, the pharisees, the bystanders, the stones.... Are we the trusted servants of the King?

Accepting where we are, and our role perhaps is more vital than ever. If we are isolated at home and cannot go out, we can still walk humbly and accept that as our role. We can graciously accept the help offered by our neighbours. We can notice the beauty of God's world around us, seeing the splendour of His bountiful provision and love. We can be challenged to be still and to listen.

If our role is to be out in the community at this time, serving others, then we too can accept where we are graciously. We can walk humbly without judgment upon others, we can offer our love unconditionally to our neighbours and slowly appreciate where we stand and be challenged by the new truths and loves that are exposed.

Wherever we walk, our Lord and King is travelling with us in what appear at the moment to be difficult days. We can be confident that

He will travel with us into the heart of trouble, with transforming peace. We can trust a King who claims a Kingdom of eternity and who loves and serves His subjects, with sacrifice and abundance and with a quiet majesty and sovereignty. How then shall we give our offering to our King?

The crowd took off their cloaks and lay them down. Luke again, wants us to notice much from this. Here are cloaks laid at the entrance to the temple for the anointing of a King in the Hebrew bible. A parallel and a prophecy. In 2 Kings 9:13

They quickly took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is King!"

Cloaks were a symbol of their status? Their identity of what they did, how much they owned and who they were in their community. To take them off for Jesus to ride over them was total recognition of His authority over them. In fact, it was total submission.

What, in these unprecedented times will you lay down in response? What badges of honour do you think Jesus would want laid before him? Not for His sake but for yours and for the world? What voices in the crowd will stop you from putting them down? What are you afraid of? Why don't we rejoice? So many questions? Here we have a King in whom we can trust that will lead us with love as His banner.

Jesus is a King who knowingly walks towards suffering. Our natural response to fear is to protect ourselves and to potentially run away. On Palm Sunday we see a King that does the opposite. He walks towards what will lead to His suffering to become the sacrifice of healing for us all.

How do we become like this same living sacrifice in times like these? With the air permeated with angst... and social distancing and many of us feeling unable to be useful, especially when we can't gather as a crowd. What does that look for now...?

We can be humble as our King is humble. We can invest our time wisely, finding ways to speak peace and justice into the world and not be afraid to confront uncomfortable truths. We can start by recognising our part in the troubles. We can see how interconnected

we all are and how we impact and make ripples that reverberate around the globe.

Jesus weeps over the city, and over their blindness to see the truth. We know that He had not to condemn it but to save it and we hear in Luke 9, how He sets out for Jerusalem with a message of peace for the world and now stands on its edge and weeps that the world does not know this peace. He weeps as He walks to the temple, telling them of how it will fall.

We too can weep over the heartache of the world and feel this same compassion but remain hopeful and trust in Jesus anointing. We long for the day when we can embrace one another, long for the day we can look into the eyes of the other. I hope and pray that we continue to hold onto what we have learnt in this time. And what Jesus wants to show us as we travel with him.

I will leave you with this, Robinson Crusoe found himself in a place of isolation which was not what was planned. He was alone within the beauty of a tropical island. He was unaware of how it would end but had to learn a new way of being. He appreciated the details of what was around him. Seeing what was important for life. Unprecedented times to see what is important. When he returns to normal, no one else has changed. But for us now, the whole world is isolated **but** together. This is an opportunity for us to see things and travel in a new way.

In Jesus we see the new way. Jesus who is the gate and He invites us to come with him through it. To confront power, to enter into the suffering with others and at experience the cost to ourselves. To enter the gate, is to not shy away from the difficulties of the world around us and to know we walk into the arms of love. It is to worship a King with a crown of thorns and of earthly pain and suffering but of heavenly glory and justice and hope. A King and leader whom we want to follow and serve. And truly is present in the world's suffering. What could God be asking of us in this time?

Let us walk together through the gates into the city, giving thanks for our every breath. Shouting joy, praise and triumph in Jesus the King Our sovereign, our majesty and our saviour. Bow down and lay ourselves down before him in honour. To our King who brings an unprecedented time of salvation.