

PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS – Peter Barham, 9 April 2022



For many years Palm Sunday was donkeys – a pair walking between Gedding and Felsham, one in the Cathedral who disgraced himself one year (Head Verger had excellent roses), Jazz the donkey in Ponteland. No donkeys here, while a procession from one church to the other would be good fun, there is a dual carriageway and roundabout to traverse. It is not the animal of a King.



Palm Sunday is crowds – never my favourite thing, and not in these Covid times. Sheffield on Thursday, Climate Change protestors as I walked back to the station. I'm on their side, I agree with them, but they still spooked me. So many parts of the world where being in a crowd is dangerous – you don't need me to make the link between the crowds of Russian citizens protesting about the invasion of Ukraine, and the crowds on a Jerusalem street shouting "Alleluia" as the Messiah arrives. Russian police clamping down on one, Roman and Jewish authorities clamping down on the other.



Palm Sunday is a journey – now I like journeys. I went to Bury St Edmunds for a day conference on Wednesday – mad, much too far for a day. But there was a joy in watching the sun rise over the Ouse washes, returning to my favourite railway station and favourite cathedral.



Even though the return journey went wrong – broken down freight train meant no trains to London, so I caught the local bus to Thetford, then a train to Ely, and back that way. Trains do not connect at Ely – I am glad to say that the fish and chip shop is still where it was when I worked in Ely Library forty years ago. I ate them while watching this sunset. I got home eventually – very pleased to have a nice warm bed at the end of the day.



Yet this week's journey is not an easy journey. I am worried about how we're going to cope with those who might come next week – can we do communion services safely? I'm well aware there are a lot of people that, in years past, would have been in church for their Easter Communion – and this year won't be. I know I need to do some home visits – and if you want one, please pick up the phone. But I know that, however much I say that, people will slip through the net, people will not want to trouble me “when we know you're busy”, and

people will have decided we don't care. This is a week when clergy feel useless. We also feel useless because it is the major religious feast of the year, and yet most people in our country will ignore it, just celebrate with chocolate. Now I love my chocolate almost as much as my wife – but there is more to Easter than chocolate. Even if it is M&S chocolate.



6th Century Mosaic, Church of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna

My journey is easier than Jesus'. We will seek to walk with him, and understand something of what the Last Supper was like. Even though there is desolation as we strip the altars and leave in silence, we go home to a warm bed, not a night in Gethsemane.



This is the image our children at Walter Evans made – their work is exceptional, and we'll have it in church and the Fellowship Room for the next few weeks. Church will be open every day after Easter – do go and visit.



The Denial of Peter, Frank Wesley

Even though I bear the same name as Peter, I cannot imagine how he felt the following morning as the cock crowed.



I find images like this, because I cannot imagine the reality of the cross. We are all capable of eating our dinner with the television on in the corner of the room, showing us the bodies of men, women and children killed in Ukraine – and we keep eating and hardly notice. What does that say about the power of evil?



I talked to the youngsters at school about Easter and what it means to me, what I think it should mean to them. 480 children all involved, making art work, listening to the Easter story from me, then telling the Easter Story in drama and music and words. Absolutely marvellous – light and joy and celebration. But part of me is angry that we'll see very few of the children over the next week, very few of their parents, very few of their teachers. Easter is so important – and now we've done it. Time for a holiday. And then I'm angry with myself, I have let darkness win, I have let despair triumph over hope – and that is not the

way it should be. The children have made us Easter gardens – and that is the message. There might also be a message that the pot they used still has its “reduced” sticker on it – Christ has given his all for the salvation of the world, and he accepts us, just as we are. We journey with him on the way of the cross, and we will come to the point of resurrection. Amen.

Peter Barham
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