

## Devotional Blog

### Palm Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022

My twin daughters have their birthdays just before Christmas. Amongst the presents were two 1,000-piece jigsaws of the map of the London Underground. Both got immense pleasure from completing the jigsaws and tried extremely hard not to look at the picture on the box, and work from memory of the Tube system. The map is so iconic and a famous symbol of London.

Symbols are everywhere. You see the giant golden arches and you know that McDonalds is nearby. A metal jaguar on the bonnet of a car will tell you a lot about the car itself, while you know instantly what is in the bottle on the supermarket shelf when the labels read HP.

Certain symbols evoke fear and loathing. The swastika, although originally an Indian symbol, is totally associated with the Third Reich. The “Z” symbol on the side of Russian tanks and armoured vehicles involved in the invasion of Ukraine has become a disputed symbol. While the Russian high command claim it means “for the victory,” others think that it is more likely to help avoid friendly fire.

The Christian faith has many symbols connected to it. Clearly the Cross is the most important, but Christians will also put the fish outline on their cars, and several Christian organisations use the symbol of the shell. There are, for example, individual symbols for each of the Gospel writers and the Apostles.

The season of Lent and Easter also has plenty of symbols, some of which are more secular than others. The simnel cake of Mothering Sunday tells us as much about social history as it does about church going in Victorian times. Easter eggs and easter bunnies dominate the supermarket adverts, but I have yet to find a chocolate bunny in the Bible!

The Palm Cross has had a revival in recent times, for it is not only a powerful symbol and relates beautifully to the Palm Sunday story, but its sale supports a variety of poorer communities.

However perhaps the most intriguing symbols of Palm Sunday are two vastly different animals!

You see, there were two triumphal processions into the City of Jerusalem that March in A.D. 33. We know from the Jewish historian Josephus that festivals in the city of Jerusalem often meant that major disturbances flared up. One such flare up is recorded as resulting in the crushing to death of 30,000 people.

That March Day back in A.D.33 was the time of the biggest festival of all; it was Passover. The city would be ram-packed with pilgrims. This is why the Roman Prefect Pilate entered the city. Normally the Romans had one cohort, about five hundred men, in the Antonia Fortress, overlooking the Temple. This was a token force. Pilate would travel down with a large battalion of troops from the main Roman garrison at Caesarea, via Joppa, and enter the city by the West Gate. The Governor would then make his headquarters in the former palace of Herod the Great. This was the most impressive private building in Jerusalem.

The procession from the west would make an emphatic statement about Roman power, a dazzling display of gleaming armour and burnished leather. The Roman foot soldiers would beat and push the populace out of the way. The cavalry would be on horseback, flying the standard of imperial Rome. At the front Pilate would ride on a powerful warhorse.

We can see Jesus' entrance to the city as a parody of the Roman procession. The small, unarmed group of mainly Galileans wending their way from the Mount of Olives in the east into the confines of the Temple.

To the west is economic, political, and military might, symbolised by its leader riding a huge warhorse. But to the east there was an entirely different, radical form of power, with its leader riding that beast of burden, a donkey. It was the Kingdom of the world opposite the Kingdom of God.

Do you know what? It's still like today!

We are still hearing plenty these days about military might and the symbols of war and terror.

When the two disciples go to pick up the donkey, they are told by Jesus that if they are challenged to say that "The Master needs it."

Those words are being said about you. The Master needs you!

The King of Kings wants you to be his symbol in our broken world.

Hosanna!

Mark Gilks

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