

Let us pray:

Lord we ask that through these words and all of our thoughts we will
Open our minds to love you better and our hearts to love you more
Amen

What a familiar passage we have just heard read. Jesus entry into Jerusalem is a defining moment that begins Holy week and which in turn becomes a tipping point in Jesus ministry. But put aside for a moment what we know about that last week and step inside this narrative.

There is anticipation in the air, the atmosphere is electric, like a tinderbox ready to ignite. Crowds are gathered. As we read and hear this reading, we become part of that crowd. Ready to wave our palms and join in with the shouts of "Hosanna". In normal times that's what we would be doing today.

It's the Passover festival, the great annual fixture when Gods chosen people celebrate God's liberation from oppressors in Egypt and keep their hopes alive that God will act again, to finally rescue his people from Roman occupation. In normal times the population in Jerusalem would be around 40,000, at a major festival there could be as many as 200,000 people gathering. It was not normal and we know all about that do not we. It is a crowd made up of pilgrims. Jesus goes as a pilgrim.

Reading Marks account it becomes clear that Jesus has choreographed everything very deliberately. Up until this point in Marks gospel, there has been a sense of keeping everything low key, of staying under the radar. It's a "sh, don't tell "Gospel until this point.

Now, as he enters Jerusalem, there is a complete turnaround. The secrecy ends, the avoidance of crowds ends and there is a dramatic entrance. Beginning at the Mount of Olives, the traditional location from which people expected the final battle for Israel's liberation to begin, Jesus begins his "final campaign". There is joy and there is singing This street theatre come carnival has been carefully orchestrated from beginning to end.

As I read this account in Mark, two things stood out for me. Two things that are unique to this gospel

First, Jesus needs transport and he simply sends for a colt – not even a fully-grown donkey in Mark! There is no stallion or warhorse as if he is leading troops into battle. A coltan unbroken, unmanageable beast of burden.

The disciples are given specific instructions – where to go, what they will find and what they are to say. Nothing happens by accident. It is a unique aspect of Marks account that he is the only one that says Jesus promised to return the colt to its owner. **'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'** Hold that thought for a minute



As I thought about the scene and the drama of it I could not also help but see the comedy too. I think I can remember having a donkey ride at the seaside when I was small. The only four legged animal I have been on since is an elephant and that was by mistake. Far too big! As you can see, I was holding on as tight as I could and that's no smile, that is unadulterated fear. I hyperventilate when I have to go in the dress circle at the theatre. Look where my legs end and where the elephants end. You have to smile.



While I look comical I think Jesus riding a colt equally brings a smile to the face . His feet must have been almost dragging on the ground as he rode into Jerusalem. To his enemies he must have looked laughable, weak and vulnerable. But let's make no mistake about it, Jesus comes not as one who lords his authority over others but as one who humbly rejects domination over others and identifies with the poor. Refusing to rely on violence.

Jesus takes on the role of Jester in this theatre who enacts in a humorous, disorientating way a totally different understanding of "rule" and invites people to see the world in a new way.

The second rather strange situation takes place after the triumphant entry. There has been throwing down of cloaks and branches. singing. And then

Jesus goes into the temple.

He has a look around at everything.

And he leaves.

Does nothing, Says nothing. Just leaves.

What an anti-climax. What's that all about.

Again Marks gospel is the only that says Jesus entered the temple, looked around, and left. So why did Jesus leave the temple and go to Bethany?. The gospel tells us why. Jesus left the temple ***“as it was already late”*** (Mark 11:11).

Two strange situations – a colt who will be returned and a Jesus looks around and goes because it was late.

I must admit it puzzled me but then I wondered if the two were connected.



Maybe Jesus left the temple as he did so that he could keep his promise to return the colt and follow through what he said he would do. Maybe this is about Jesus being true to his word and to himself despite what the week holds for him? What if returning the colt is a metaphor for us as we enter into and walk through this Holy Week

What might returning the colt mean for us throughout this week? It's an image think on and it raises a couple of questions.

First, what do you need to return this week? What do you need to release or let go of? We all have stuff that we've carried around with us for far too long. It's no longer able to take us anywhere or give us life. It's just baggage we carry that continues to weigh us down. It impoverishes life. It corrupts our heart.

What do you need to let go of, release, and return this week? Is it a grudge or resentment? Anger? Fear? Disappointment and regret? Guilt? Envy? Maybe you need to return being in control, having to be right, a need for approval, perfectionism. I don't know what it is for you but I am convinced that we all have our stuff. Maybe Holy Week is the time to return and release it all to God, trusting that God can do something with this stuff when we aren't able to.

And what if returning and releasing this stuff is also about returning to ourselves? What if it's about returning to our centre and reclaiming our true self? That means we could then move forward, not from the same old place, but from the newly recovered centred self. That's what Jesus did. He stayed true to himself through this week, and so must we.

So maybe returning the colt is ultimately about returning to our original self, that self of beauty and goodness, that God created in and has loved from the beginning? Returning to and reclaiming those parts of ourselves that have been lost, ignored, forgotten, or denied. Even as we carry around that stuff that needs to be returned, so also there are parts of ourselves and our life to which we need to return to.

Secondly, What do you need to return to? What if we returned to joy, hope, beauty, truth and honesty? What if we came back to justice, mercy, forgiveness? What if we reclaimed the dignity and holiness of each human life? What if we recentre ourselves in peace and courage? What if we returned to love of neighbour, self, and enemy? Coming back to ourselves would be like a new life, wouldn't it?

So we begin this week by returning the colt. What do you need to return and to what do you need to return to? Those are the two questions.

To answer them we must look around at everything. That's what Jesus did. It's not so much just looking around at everything outside us but looking around at everything within us. Look at what's there. Look at what's missing. Look at what you need, what you feel, who you truly are, and who you want to be.

Returning the colt is how Holy Week begins. Returning to God and ourselves is the promise of how this week will end. Look around at everything and then go and return the colt.