

Thank-you for this opportunity : as Environmental Chaplain for the movement of EcoCongregation Scotland, it's a very valuable privilege to be part of one of the defining festivals of the church year. We have a national gathering in April, and celebrate the Season of Creation throughout September, but most important of all is not to invent, but to uncover the Green Heart of the faith of Christ. Looking around **these** walls, where better?

Today is a festival.... to celebrate **a festival getting out of hand**, when Jesus skilfully roused what looked like be a rabble, because he gave them a way - at least for that day only - to activate their scriptures by their lived experience.

For them, on this day, scriptures are recycled into reality, **to** the many-layered dismay of those clinging on to a travesty of authority in a brutally occupied country. And, they're trying to keep the Empire happy.

They **have** preserved their solemn festivals - as long as they stay decorative and harmless; as long as faith can't point to change. Taking their faith **so** seriously they're **not allowed to take faith seriously.**

But that's exactly what Jesus insists on, with his pointed re-enactment of a prophetic victory - though a victory of a categorically different sort from those of Empire.

Showing that the Word of God is experiential, terrestrial and of real **help**.

And that to disregard the warnings and signs we're given, by faith, science, and global neighbours, does real **harm**. To us and to all. Instead, we look from a different angle.

Let's start with the donkey. OK, people **have** been laughing about those **ears** since before Gospel times, and here in this chapel there's a donkey-eared devil.

But not in **Hebrew** culture, where the donkey's courage and virility occupied prophets and others. Courage, because, as a mountain animal, when danger looms, a donkey stands their ground where a horse clears off across the steppe. For donkeys, **persistence is the better part of valour**. Hebrew Royalty is **not** embarrassed to ride a donkey: they convey the practicality and seriousness of peace rather than the injustice and bombast of war. Donkeys are abducted with virgin

daughters, coveted alongside sexy partners and **prohibited from hard labour** on the Sabbath.

To be riding donkeys is therefore not straightforwardly synonymous with humility, at least not the grovelling kind. It's the humility of **dignity**. What you'd **want** in your leader.

Matthew speaks of two donkeys- young and old, to fit in with prophecy. And it's not for me to correct the Gospel. But rather to learn from Matthew's **donkey-riding** concern to repurpose faith resources from the dusty glass case to the street. It's even been suggested that the mother-and baby donkey set is a polemic against power politics.

Searching scripture, the fellow creatures we call donkeys are seldom a laughing-stock, but rather the dignified, practical, sentient transport of royalty as well as the mainstay of industry. Like a landrover, **but with feelings**. The donkey is not just an object - they share the glory. It's not just Jesus but the donkey who treads on the fine clothes spread out on the road.

In the Old testament, the donkey to whom God gives the power of speech to rebuke the enemy magician Balaam, - even if we read it humorously - illuminates our dependence on the creatures we

exploit, and yes, the gratitude **they** are due. And **God** due **for** them.

Palm Sunday is the **disruption** tradition **obliges** us to build in to our observance of Christ's journey to the cross, though the planners in our churches have found ways to diffuse this, crowbarring in the Passion narrative before even Holy Week gets under way.

In so doing, they **have** dealt with a **genuine** pastoral problem - for people who work weekdays - of going straight from a hosanna procession to the Hallelujah of **Easter** morning, without the healing dark and scary stuff in between.

But let's not **prematurely** burst the bubble of praise which the authorities of Jesus' own time found so out of hand and out of place. Christ's joyful tongue of a teacher, which, who, when he spoke, provoked beatings, insults and spitting.

And though we've lost the Christmas traditions of a *Boy Bishop* and a *Lord of Misrule*, we still need to take a look at how **we** keep our faith harmless. In case anyone gets the idea it's there to help you change.

Let's not forget the bits which are also left out: and speculate with fascination as to **why** they're left out: that having entered the city and the Temple Jesus engaged in non-violent but **very direct** action against unfair trade, turning those tables before reclaiming the holy place by the healing of those in need, the blind and the lame.

All of **that** is Palm Sunday - or as it's called in France - **the Sunday of the Branches**, because only John's Gospel specifies **palm** branches: for the rest it's whatever came to hand. Jesus, after all, asked us to take note of **all** the trees. The **Sunday of the Branches**, when we are invited to see God at work **within** Creation, and, with an extreme irony, **through** human actions.

This is The Day when Jesus was **welcomed by branches** on his terrifying path to unity with **that** Tree, which artists and poets have powerfully identified with the Tree of Life, the fruitful habitat of the birds who bridge Heaven and Earth, the shelter under which God's creatures give birth. The wellbeing of Creation is **highly** valued in Scripture, where the Sabbath and the Jubilee are for the good of the Earth and their wild creatures - **even including humans**.

The **wisdom** of **Solomon** is explicitly described in these terms: that *he spoke of animals, birds, creeping things, fish,and trees. [1 Kings 4:33]*. To cherish respect and revere Creation is to be all the more faithful to the God who sustains **us**. And to recognise that, as in the rainbow covenant of Genesis, that “**us**” means life as a whole. It makes the crucifixion: - **the torture of the tree to torture flesh and blood** - all the more obscene.

So, with Palms and with branches, as creatures amongst creatures, we find **ourselves** welcoming Jesus in his careful and intentional action, designed to open up access to God and to healing and to justice.

And we find ourselves in the same danger , when it suits us, of colluding with the crucifixion of the Earth, each new oilfield a jagged nail hammered into their already ravaged body.

The Jerusalem protestors - like the climate strikers who gather in our city streets are young, and lack a clear or hopeful view of how things will turn out.

Shut them up, send them back to school, says the establishment. But what Jesus seems to value - and annoyingly encourage - is that for them, the dormant disconnected treasures of their faith have found meaning.

The teachings of their religion are what they reach for to express their hopes, their fears. And to claim **joy** in so doing.

That's why more than 600 congregations have registered with the charity I work for.

We're about truth- *and much of that truth is scary* - but not about gloom and doom, but rather hope and spiritual resilience, expressed in prayer expressed in care and real action. Cutting waste, cleaning beaches, welcoming wildlife.

We let the bad news into the place of the Good News because **with** Christ, who travels **this** journey we have hope, even beyond the cross. Even beyond Too Late. As, by the standards and warnings of our lifetime, too many tipping points **have** passed to snap our fingers and fix the planet

So what do the crowd reach for when Jesus comes by? What, alongside the **branches** comes to hand?

The stories of David, the songs of the prophet. The tone is joyful. And yet the key word here is **“Help!”** Hosanna! God help us! And built into that both the recognition of threat, crisis, injustice and the **blessing** that God is **worth** crying out to. In **Luke’s** version of the story, when we stifle that cry for help, the **stones** become prophets as indeed does the Earth speaking through the thousands of peer-reviewed scientists behind the notoriously cautious United Nations climate reports presented to the powerful. And the immediate witness of those whose homelands are dried out or washed away.

To follow Jesus, we don’t **stifle** those cries, we give them voice. Don’t let Palm Sunday be the day of capitulation to the tyranny of misguided common sense, of business-as-usual, of keeping the climate striking children quiet for as Jesus so very bluntly asked the chief priests and the teachers of the Law-of-Business-As-Usual
“have you never read,
“From the lips of children and infants - from the voices we disregard,
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”