

## Jesus the Rebel

We have arrived at Palm Sunday and also at our Lenten theme 'Jesus the Rebel'. I find this an interesting title to think about. As Jesus entered Jerusalem on the back of a small colt or donkey you could argue that this act was itself an act of rebellion, but equally you could say that the humility of the donkey ride was an act designed to calm any thought of a rebellion.

Let's take a step back and begin by asking ourselves what is a rebel?

Cambridge Dictionary: 'a person who refuses to accept the government's power and uses force to oppose it, or a person who opposes authority and thinks or behaves differently'

We talk about the teenage years as the time when young people rebel against their parents' authority. That sense in which a young person sets out to define who they are as an individual rather than holding on to the childhood reliance on the authority of parents.

I'm not sure this helps us reflect on Jesus as Rebel, what Jesus is doing so much more than a teenage rebellion. It could be argued that Jesus wasn't a rebel at all. In many ways he was a very conservative person. He spoke about true faith and doing things correctly. He hated hypocrisy and as much as the turning of the tables in the temple in Matthew 21 seems like an act of rebellion it could be seen as wanting to put right what is wrong by returning to the old values of the Jewish faith, of true and right worship of God rather than the corrupt ways of the market traders.

Then we have the rebellion against the government or rulers of the time. Jesus was certainly accused of sedition, of words seeking to overthrow the established rule. That will become very apparent as we move through the events of Holy Week which are ahead of us. But he also said 'Render to Caesar that which is of Caesar and to God that which is of God', in so many ways he was not rebelling.

In a world where there is so much wrong we have to be careful we are not creating an image of Jesus just to suit our own need to validate our particular opinions. We could be in danger of turning him into something he really isn't. Our very own eco warrior or judge of all that is unjust.

You see I don't think that Jesus was rebelling against. The political situation of the time, I don't even think he was rebelling against the Pharisees and the Sadducees. I think the act of rebellion was more to do with what they had become, the rebellion was more to do with their attempts to hold power to themselves at all costs.

Look at the situation of the time. The religious leaders had lost their grip. The Romans would not allow them the power they so wanted to re-establish their own form of orthodoxy, one which involved them using whatever means they could to ensure they held on to power. We are given to believe that a lot of this was to ensure they remain wealthy and as a result corruption was rife.

I think that is what Jesus was rebelling against- it was those who seek to use power for their own gain. Those who trample on the poor and needy, rather than use their power to build

structures which support and enable the poor and needy to be lifted out of their poverty and need.

But I believe this act of rebellion went further than this. I am sure that Jesus could have acquired a dashing stallion and travelled this Jerusalem road like a King should. But he didn't and why not? Instead he chose to travelling the path of humility, the path of love. The text we read gives us two pictures, one of a crowd in a state of frenzy. 'Hosanna- Save us' with huge cries for Jesus to rebel against the Roman tyranny of the time and free them from subjugation and on the other hand Jesus who says nothing and in saying nothing he speaks louder than any great speech. He is most certainly choosing the path of peace over the potential of greatness, of power and a great following. It reminds me a bit of the temptations in the wilderness that began our season of Lent. 'Bow down to me and I will make you great' the Devil told him.

I like the way that we hear that when Jesus got to the temple courts, 'He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.'

There is something very human about these words. It was late, there will have been a curfew in place. Jesus didn't want his 'act of rebellion' to be in the dark, sneaking around corners avoiding the Romans. This rebellion was to be played out in a very public way, and leading to the most public act of rebellion, with Him being nailed to a cross and left to die. But then of course comes the greatest act of rebellion, the resurrection. An act of rebellion against death itself through the ultimate sacrifice of love. The words written by John in 1 John are some of my favourite words in the bible:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

And there it is, because of what God has done for us we should, dear friends, we need to spread the greatest of all rebellions, one of love, God's radical love shown to us through Jesus as he travelled to Jerusalem on that very first Palm Sunday.

So my prayer for each one of us is that we too will work tirelessly to share the 'rebellion of love' this Eastertime and always.