

**FIRST PARISH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
East Derry, New Hampshire**

**Alice M.C. Ling, Senior Pastor**

Palm Sunday

9 April 2006

Philippians 2:5-11

Mark 11:1-11

We've spent the Lenten season hearing from characters who were part of Jesus' final week and trying to get inside their heads. Trying to imagine what was going on for them, what they were experiencing, why they did what they did and how they felt about it. How much they understood of what was happening and whether they had any clue that they were playing a part in changing the world for the rest of time. And as I said in my newsletter article, the point at the heart of it all is to encourage each of us to think about our role, our place, our response to Jesus and his presence and his teachings – as well as how we stand up in the presence of that sort of pressure and fear.

And now it's time to step back to the beginning of the week, to Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. We think palm branches and Hosannas and a colt and a crowd and excitement and a parade. Everybody loves a parade, and this one is one of the best in the life of the church. Here comes Jesus, and everybody is here, everybody is on, everybody is pumped! Where would we have been that Sunday at the gate of Jerusalem? Out in the middle of the street, two steps ahead of the colt, scurrying to get our jackets in place on the road in time for it to walk on them? Standing on the sidelines, waving a branch or two, shouting our Hosannas! And Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Or off tending to the duties of the day, trying to get something accomplished, trying to keep a finger in the dike, trying to maintain the status quo for one more day? I want to share with you a poem entitled "*The Arrival*" that for me poses those questions in a really striking way.

On the day  
when Jesus the prophet  
arrived in our town,  
Joe Farmer was very busy  
choosing a new car.  
He heard the distant cheering:  
"Hosanna! Blessed is he  
who comes in the name of the Lord."  
Mentally he made a note  
and promised himself  
he'd hear the prophet;  
some day,  
not now.  
Joe was far too occupied  
with trade-in price,

fuel consumption,  
and the virtues of the ST  
or the LJ model,  
and whether either car  
was better  
than his neighbour's.

At coffee break  
22 year old Esther Romantic  
also heard the uproar  
coming from High Street.  
She felt an impulse  
to go and join the crowd  
with those who welcomed  
the prophet,  
for stories about him  
had strangely  
shaken and encouraged her.  
But Esther's wedding day  
was only seven weeks off  
and she still had thinking to do  
about the flowers,  
shade of eye shadow,  
or whether on the tables  
she wanted with every place card  
a wishbone.

For Jim Smiley  
the real estate agent  
it was infuriating:  
Time was money!  
Here he was stuck in a traffic jam  
in the middle of town,  
thanks to these idiots  
with grins, slogans and palm branches,  
supporting this new fool  
Jesus  
who had said some rotten things  
about real estate.  
Jim was due in four minutes  
at Toorak Place  
to meet with a wealthy client.  
Jim yelled at a policeman  
patrolling the edge of the procession:  
"How about some law and order!"

Some did not even hear  
the cheering  
nor cared.  
Beth Goldsmith  
with fingers covered with rings  
was watching "Days of our lives"  
when the prophet  
walked within one block  
of her residence.  
They interrupted the programme  
for an eyewitness report  
on the progress  
of the street demo.  
Beth took the opportunity  
to fetch another pot of coffee  
and two aspirin.

Professor Nicodemus  
was lecturing at the Uni.  
He noted the small number  
who had turned up today,  
and even they were restless.  
He asked the reason.  
They gave him the news  
that the prophet Jesus  
was leading a demo  
to the Central Mall.  
On an impulse Nicodemus  
dismissed the surprised students  
and hurried off down High Street  
where, somewhat embarrassed,  
he joined the crowd and found  
himself shouting "Hosanna!"  
At the sound of his own voice,  
the Prof felt his own soul-  
as if a birth was about to take place-  
leap for joy within!  
And it seemed as if all things  
were becoming new.

Opportunity knocks. Sometimes.

(BD Prewer, <http://www.alphalink.com.au/~nigel/doc/B060409.htm>)

There's another image I want to lift up, also by way of a poem. And for me it grows out of the final verse of Mark's rendition of the story. Mark tells that after all the hoopla of Jesus' arrival at

the city gate, Jesus found himself standing quietly at the entrance to the temple, where he looked around at everything and then turned around and went out to Bethany with the twelve. The crowd had scattered to separate corners of the city. Jesus was alone. He entered the temple, but there was no priestly greeting. Jesus was ignored. All he could do was look things over and get the lay of the land and then call it quits for the day.

Where do you suppose they went? What were they up to? Were they disenchanted all ready? Did they have more pressing business to tend to? Had they been disappointed in what they'd seen and so gone off to see who else they could find to cheer and welcome and follow?

This poem is written by Joy Crowley

No donkey this time  
but a borrowed Honda 550.  
Jesus riding into town  
with a black leather jacket,  
jeans frayed at the knees,  
and L-O-V-E tattooed  
on the knuckles of his right hand.  
Those who saw him  
said his smile was like the sun,  
warming shadowed corners  
and causing the way to blossom  
unexpectedly.  
Those who saw him told  
of all the light left over  
to be taken home and set  
in eyes, in hearts  
and at windows for strangers.  
It was like a miracle,  
they said.

The rest of us missed it.  
We were in another part of the city,  
waiting for the Messiah.

Joy Crowley, from *Resources for Preaching and Worship, Year B.*, p. 106)

Let us welcome the Christ – as he is. Where he is. As he comes to us. Open to what he brings, how he loves, where he calls us to love and serve and follow. Let us be there, at the city gate at the beginning of this week. And at the table, in the garden, in Pilate's hall, and at the foot of the cross. By the grace of God and in the strength of our faith, may we be there – with him.

Amen.