**Holy Week 2021 : Reflections and Prayers**

*I'd like you to use your imagination:  Imagine you only have one week left to live, and you know it.  What do you do? Some might say, "I guess I'd want to know how God would want me to live it."  Fortunately, we do know...

This week, we're going to take a look at what Jesus did in his last week of life.  Simply put, Jesus did all that you would come to expect of someone who claims to be God on earth: He does the unexpected.  As Christians, we believe his extraordinarily surprising, unorthodox, ironic and supernatural actions and words deserve deeper, reflective thought.  So, each day this week, you'll receive an email from me with some prayers, questions and thoughts about the meaning of the season we are in right now:  Holy Week, the last week of Jesus' life.*

*May our Lord Bless you and guide you as you walk with him.*

*Brian*  **Setting the Stage:**
John's gospel account of Jesus' life tells us what happened just before Day 1 of Jesus' last week:   Jesus has just raised his friend Lazarus from the dead (after having wept, of course).  A lot of the Jews have now placed their faith in him.  A lot of the Jews don't like this.  Six days before the Passover feast, the Jews are gathered in Jerusalem preparing for the Passover with a ceremonial cleansing.  Jesus, being a Jew himself, is, naturally, expected to show up.  But (this is just like Jesus!) he isn't there.  The Jews are looking for him.  You can almost hear the jittery concern in their voices:  "Isn't he coming to the Feast after all?"   Some of the Jews are asking this because he's the "life of the party"; others are asking this because they want to kill him.  Slight difference.  Nevertheless, there's a singular question hanging on everyone's hearts and lips:  "Where is Jesus?"

Well...it seems that Jesus is having a party outside of Jerusalem in a town called Bethany with his friends Lazarus, and his sisters Mary, and Martha.  Here is Jesus getting on with his work, preparing for the coming week and enjoying the company of friends when (in most people’s eyes) he "should be cleansing himself" for the Passover!  But ‘if the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath’ it seems reasonable to us that Jesus is spending time with his friends, especially with someone who has just been raised from the dead?  Somethings are simply more important than "ceremonial cleansing".

Especially if you know that within the next seven days you are going to die.

*Reflect on this question:  "In what ways do I opt for 'ceremonial cleansing' instead of a celebration of life?"
Take time to pray:  "Lord, cleanse me from within.  Help me not to be so concerned about what people think of me on the outside.  Help me to be clean of heart."*

Meanwhile, the Jews in Jerusalem are busy planning Lazarus' death which is ironic being as he has just been brought back to life.

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**Day 1:  Palm Sunday**
It's time to leave the party at Lazarus' house and go to Jerusalem for the Festival.

In their accounts Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus asks a couple of his disciples to go into a village nearby and "borrow" a colt that has never been ridden before.  Jesus knows all the details: where to find the colt, how they will recognize it (it's tied up), what to say to the owner of the colt.  If these events had happened today Jesus might have said something like:

"I want you to go to St Austell.  In the car park next to the Manor Dental Practice, you'll find a brand-new car, bright yellow.  Bring it to me.  When you go to take it away, the man who owns it will come out and say, 'What the heck are you doing with my brand-new car?'  You say:  'The Lord needs it.'  He'll just let you take it."

Now, here's the funny part:  Jesus rides into Jerusalem on this colt, and people are basically proclaiming him to be their king.  In those days, a king would ride into town with great fanfare on a horse, surrounded by attendants and soldiers.  Jesus had none of that.  (It would be like a parade in London for our Queen: imagine the Queen of England riding in a yellow car in a parade.  It just doesn't happen.)  But Jesus doesn't mind.  It's just another one of his surprises, because he continually reminds us what kind of king he really is.  He's a humble king, trekking the corridor of death.
*Take time to pray:  "Lord, make me truly humble of heart."*

While Jesus is riding into town, people are laying palm branches in his path.  A strange custom in our way of thinking, until we learn that for the Jews the palm was a symbol of prosperity, beauty and victory.  Solomon's temple, for example, made use of the palm motif to signify this. *(see I Kings 6:29, 32, 35; 7:36).*  The actions of Day 1 are ironic on many levels:  the people wanted him to rule their nation, but not their hearts.
*Reflect on this question:  "In what ways can I genuinely ascribe prosperity, beauty and victory to Christ today? In what ways can I allow Christ to rule my heart?"
Take time to pray:  "Lord, I thank you.*

While the people were laying palm branches in his path, they were also shouting, "Hosanna!" which means "Save us!"  Yet another irony:  the people wanted him to save them, but they had no idea that it would take his death to do that.  Jesus didn't want to save the people from the Romans: he wanted to save them from themselves.  And he would die to make that happen.
*Reflect on this question:  "What areas of my life do I need saving from? Take time to pray:  "Lord Jesus Christ, save me.  Have mercy on me.  Forgive me of my sin. Save me from myself."*

After he arrived in Jerusalem, he went to the temple and looked around.  Then, "since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve."  *(Mark 11:11).*  I wonder what he thought as he lay down that night, the end of a long day, the end of a long month, the beginning of a long week...

**Digging Deeper**
Try reading the different gospel accounts of Day 1:
Matthew 21:1-11 Mark 11:1-11 Luke 19:28-44 John 12:12-19