

Palm Sunday Reflection – Rev Sally Carter

Imagine being one of the trampers who went on their tramp knowing about COVID 19 and that there were a few cases in New Zealand and coming out to find the whole country in lockdown! What an adjustment they would have had to make to their plans and their expectations of their journey.

Many of us have had to make adjustments too - expected trips have had to be cancelled or postponed, some of us have had to make rushed journeys to get back from holidays or visits in time to be home for the period of lockdown. We have had to make huge adjustments in responding to large life events - how we mourn for friends and loved ones, how we wait for the birth of grandchildren, great grandchildren or neighbour's children.

Most of us will have experience of journeys which started out one way and ended quite differently. I remember as a teenager going for a family tramp in the Kaueranga Valley near Thames. We set out on a fine day, with our packs, our food, our sleeping bags and so on, headed for the Pinnacles Hut where we would enjoy a cosy night before completing the loop track the next morning. Well, you can probably guess some of the things that happened. First, it became increasingly clear that we were not on the right track for the Pinnacles Hut. In fact, we didn't seem to be on the right track for anything. Second, the fine day turned to a drizzly day, then to a rainy evening. Still no hut. So we made a bivouac and slept the night in the rain in our bracken bivvy and managed to find our way out the next morning. I assume we ate something but I can't remember what or how.

Maybe you would like to share some of your memories of unexpected journeys with us.

Those around Jesus had to make adjustments to their expectations too. The journey into Holy Week begins with this strange parade - Jesus riding on a (ahem) 'borrowed' donkey with her colt. This is in fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy

"Say to Zion's daughter
Look, here comes your king
He's gentle and he's riding on a donkey
On a colt, a donkey's foal."

Painting a dramatic contrast to the mighty horse which Pilate rode through the gate at the other end of the city. Jesus is at the head of a crowd waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna! Save us! Imagine being one of Jesus' disciples as Jesus finally seems to be being recognised as the Messiah, the

one who came to save the world. This is probably the time in our lives when we can truly imagine shouting out Hosanna! Save us! Not in a crowd, though! But the triumphant journey doesn't go where Jesus' disciples expect it to. The Messiah doesn't topple the Romans in an exultant overthrow of power. We know where this journey leads Jesus and his followers. It leads Jesus through unjust trials, betrayal, denial and shameful death on the cross. It leads his disciples through desertion, shame, failure, bewilderment, isolation, and fear.

I find it quite reassuring to know that Jesus' disciples didn't cope all that well with the unexpected turns their journey took in the crisis of Holy Week. Because I am sure many of us are wondering what a faithful response to our crisis might look like. Professor Tom Wright wrote an article for Time Magazine. You can read it [here](#). The headline is 'Christianity offers no answers about the Coronavirus. It's not supposed to.' The article confirms that a faithful way through this extraordinary time in our human history is not going to be through God's striking the virus dead or

What faith offers is that through our journeys, whether they go as expected or not, God is with us, unafraid to go with us into the depths of our suffering, willing to stay with us in the shame of our failings, restoring us to our best selves by his abundant resurrection grace.

And so we begin our journey into this most unusual Holy Week. Maybe we think we know where the journey ends.... But stay with us and see what unexpected turns it takes.