

St Bartholomew's Burnley, Sunday 29th March 2026
Palm Sunday

As a youngster, each Saturday afternoon during the Aussie Rules Football season (soccer was virtually unheard of, and rugby, well what can we really say about rugby??) my mates, all around 10-12 years old, would walk to the Richmond Punt Road oval, Football was tribal in those days, with our Richmond jumpers on, black shorts for the home game, our footy boots around our shoulders. We stood patiently among the crowd, barracking our lungs out for legends as Roy Wright, Fred Swift and Ronnie Branton until half time when we would run onto the field to imitate our heroes, playing kick to kick. As we watched the game every Richmond mark was a glorious moment, a red -letter minute, and Fred Swift's drop kicks from the goal post to the centre of the ground a time of triumphal euphoria – we were part of the crowd shouting with enthusiasm and participating fully. We were not just onlookers, but part of the action. The barracking, the taking of the Lord's name in vain, thrust us into the centre of the unfolding drama. When the game was going well, meaning we were winning, our hopes and expectations were fulfilled, joy filled our hearts. When the game turned sour, so did our hopes. Our cries of support turned to expressions of despair.

Crowds can be fickle, as we say, often led by self-interest and unscrupulous leaders, or in today's world, media owners, self-interested politicians or business leaders, or even church and religious leaders. The last few weeks of events in the Middle East and the relentless analysis by the media in all its forms, has turned last week's happenings into a charade, political opportunism at home and abroad or circus and the truth

lost in the analysis. Knowing who and what to believe in in our post-post-modern world is a challenge.

Today we begin the most solemn part of the Christian year – we are on the way to the first Good Friday. It is a sobering thought to reflect that the crowd who gathered on Palm Sunday and shouted with such enthusiasm

“Hosanna to the Son of David

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord

Hosanna in the highest”

who were present as part of the same crowd who, 5 days later, shouted “Crucify him, crucify him”. Luke in his account of the Crowd’s shouting Hosanna has not the whole crowd, but the disciples saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord”, not the whole crowd.

Matthew on the other hand has the crowd shouting these words. The two events however tell us something about crowds. Soren Kierkegaard, a Christian philosopher and theologian, speaks about crowds and says that when in a crowd we all can be swept away by emotions; lose our rationality and act without responsibility. Metaphorically, we can see examples of this in Australia today:

1. The myths about boat people and asylum seekers
2. The myth that services like health, education, justice and transport can be provided for without paying taxes
3. The myth that things are tough for most Australians {yes there are some struggling, but we are as a nation with more resources than at any time in our history and we could solve the issue if we had the belief and the political will}
4. The myth that just cutting Government expenditure will solve our problems rather than create new ones.

Crowds can be volatile. Crowds can be fickle. We can be part of a crowd and yet not recognise that we may be being manipulated or {sucked in} as we may say colloquially.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, a new drama unfolds. Apprehension, tension, anticipation and uncertainty raise their heads. Jesus immediately challenges the expectations of the crowd, and the religious and political leaders. Luke records Jesus weeping over the city and then cleanses the temple. His actions upsets the religious and political leaders of the day while the crowds were spell bound. The tone of adoration and expectation begins to shift from cries of joy to cries of condemnation, egged on by the religious and political leaders themselves. As the story emerges and the situation unravels, the death and resurrection of Jesus plays out in acts of betrayal, sacrifice, love and forgiveness.

Death, impossible! Surely this is the last thing on the minds of the crowd on that first Palm Sunday – yet their enthusiasm wanes, their views are swayed and the cries of blessing become cries of hatred.

And where do you stand? Perhaps you are a distant onlooker, or an interested observer or an impartial spectator? The story is attractive to you, but you have not quite grasped the implications for how you live your own life and the meaning of discipleship. Are you prepared to be an active player and participant? In our 24/7 world, there are so many distractions calling us away to places, spaces and events that have no synergy to the events about to unfold in the days ahead. The events of Palm Sunday and Good Friday are a commentary on our brokenness, frailty, self-interest and struggles. And they can be applied as much to our times as they were in the times of Jesus. The temptation is to follow the

crowd. It is easy to follow the crowd. It takes courage and strength to say no to the crowd and to walk in the way the cross - not as a detached observer, but as one who embraces the story of the cross as their story. As a consequence of the crowd being led by unscrupulous leaders Jesus is condemned. He is killed outside the city gates by the Roman authorities with the support of the religious leaders. Yet as people, privileged to know the full story, we know that the Cross-is not the end, but the promise of God's love and justice.

I invite you to journey this week to the cross and to Easter Day when the fullness of God's love is proclaimed and our mission in the world set free.

Amen