

Judas and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Before you listen to this story it would be helpful to read Matthew 21.1-17, Matthew's version of what we know as the story of Palm Sunday.

Matthew 2.1-17 *When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately. This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,*

*'Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

*'Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'*

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' ¹¹ The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written,

*"My house shall be called a house of prayer";
but you are making it a den of robbers.'*



The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them.⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became angry and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read,

*"Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise for yourself"?'*

He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

I thought it was all going to happen today. I've only ever dreamed of revolution, I've never actually been part of one. After all that has happened recently, and as Passover drew closer, it was clear that the people of the city were on edge and I could see that Jesus was becoming more thoughtful, what he said was more enigmatic and difficult to understand than usual something was brewing and I thought, I hoped, it would finally be revolution.

I was brought up to be patriotic. Our Jewish faith and our own land were the two things that were most important to us, both were gifts from God. We were the Chosen People and the land of Canaan was the land God promised to **us**, which was why we hated the Romans so much. They were the invading force. They merely tolerated our faith with disdain, and they allowed us to live in our land with relative freedom, so long as we obeyed the laws **they** imposed and paid the taxes **they** levied.

As I grew up I became more faithful, more patriotic and my hatred of the Romans grew more intense. Then I heard about Jesus, a strange preacher and teacher from Nazareth. I went in search of him and spent a few days watching and listening at a distance. It became clear that he was turning the world upside down, or trying to. I was delighted when, eventually, he noticed me and invited me to join his close friends and followers. As time went by I became more and more convinced that Jesus was the one who was going to lead us to a revival of our faith and to liberation from Roman rule. He took my breath away nearly every day; he embraced lepers, healed the sick, spoke of the last being first and the first last, he talked about poverty, justice, compassion, he pointed out the hypocrisy of the religious elite, he made heroes out of Samaritans and wayward sons. The way he lived, the things he did, the stories he told, convinced me that revolution was coming.



And then, about a week before Passover, he asked one of us to get him a donkey! See what I mean? He'd never wanted a donkey before. He surprised us every day. It was only when he was sitting on the donkey and riding through the gates of the city that I realised what might be happening. Crowds began to gather. With his healing and teaching he had made quite a name for himself so people were fascinated by him. Whoops and cheers began to be yelled. Then the chanting began, 'Hosanna!' 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' The crowd were behind him, they were asserting **their** authority in **their** city and by proclaiming him Son of David they were asserting **their** Jewish roots. The irony was delicious, here was a penniless rabbi from Nazareth being hailed as a king as he rode, not on a regal horse or high above the people on an imposing camel, but sitting on a donkey. As he plodded along on the stocky little animal, he simply smiled and waved, though I think I saw some tears as well – maybe it was the dust?

He seemed calm, but my heart was racing with excitement. We were heading for the Temple – maybe there he would step off the donkey and make a speech calling the people to revolution? I sensed it was going to be a great day.

When we eventually arrived at the Temple he stepped off the donkey and without turning to speak to the crowd, he went in to the precincts. I thought that was odd, but then I realised he must be going in to pray before making his great speech he was making the crowd wait, a great ploy to build expectation and intensity. I followed him excitedly with the other disciples.

It was business as usual in the temple. The smell of incense mixed with the burning meat of sacrifices. Worshippers coming and going as ever, some rejoicing and others lamenting. Imperious priests, scribes and Pharisees strutting about importantly. The money changers and the people who sold animals for the sacrifices calling out, advertising their wares. As we entered, Jesus suddenly seemed to lose his temper. He took my breath away again I had never seen him like this before. He shouted, 'This is a house of prayer, not a den of robbers.' And he tipped over several tables. Coins were scattered everywhere and doves and pigeons flew into the air, in their panic some flew in to the Temple to be trapped amongst the dusty beams of the roof. Once the coins had stopped spinning and rolling and the screeching birds had dispersed, there was an odd silence. My heart was still racing, an excited, supportive, expectant crowd outside the Temple, a violent demonstration of anger inside the Temple.... the intensity of the atmosphere was building. Now, maybe he would go out to address the crowd, the new kingdom was coming near, the days of Roman oppression were coming to an end



He didn't go outside. He went over to the area in the precincts where the beggars congregated and, his anger seemingly passed, he began to talk and pray with them. He laid his hands on some and embraced others.

We had no idea what to do – there was an excitable crowd of people outside, waiting for him to do or to say something. There were some very angry business men and women scrabbling in the shadows and down the cracks of stones for their coins and others trying to catch their pigeons and doves. And, as ever, there were the priests, scribes and Pharisees angrily watching everything.

The crowd outside were quieter now. I was worried that the moment to ignite the revolution might be passing, and then we heard some children. They were still chanting, singing out their support for Jesus, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' Jesus left the poor, sick beggars and began to walk out of the Temple precincts. He walked past a group of fuming chief priests and scribes, 'You hear those children?' he said quietly to the religious leaders, 'they know what they are talking about **they** know more than **you**!' He smiled and we walked out into the sunshine ... maybe this was going to be the moment?

As they saw him emerge from the Temple, the murmuring crowd quietened, waiting for him to speak he turned his back on them and beckoned to the one of us who had gone to get the donkey at the beginning of the day. 'Please take the donkey back where you found him and thank the owner.' He said. Then he turned to the rest of us, and with his familiar, gentle smile he said, 'Come on friends, let's walk to Bethany, we'll stay there tonight, maybe we can persuade Martha and Mary to prepare us some food?'

And that was it! The day was coming to a close. A day when he had a crowd who loved him, in the palm of his hand a day when he could have started a revolution in a heartbeat, a day when the new kingdom could have been born and our hated enemies overthrown by a loyal mob asserting their rights and their power to practise their faith and run their own country And there we were, walking to Bethany to beg for food, and the crowd, frustrated and confused, returning to their homes. As we walked away I could hear a few children still excitedly and singing, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'

Expectation, excitement, confusion, disappointment, frustration these intense emotions led me, eventually, at the end of that day to anger. I clung to that anger and allowed it to grow. Anger was good. I believed anger was fuel of revolution. I didn't show my anger, it seethed within me, beneath an air of calm acceptance.



Martha and Mary did feed us and then we found an empty barn to sleep in. Most of my friends fell asleep immediately, but I lay awake. I watched through large holes in the roof as the last rays of the sun gave way to stars in the night sky. I let my anger intensify. One angry man could not start a revolution. Where else had I seen anger as the events of the day had unfolded? Jesus had been angry, but only for a moment, it had soon passed. Then I remembered those angry scribes and Pharisees in the Temple precincts, I knew their anger was deep-seated. Then I remembered the confused and frustrated crowd I began to wonder if there might be a way to combine my anger with that of the scribes and Pharisees to transform the confusion and frustration of the crowd into anger as well maybe then there would be enough to start the revolution?

But, where did Jesus fit in my thinking? My disappointing hero. I loved him for sure, but he was the spark that could ignite all the smouldering anger in me and these others, so that the fire of revolution could burn.

The wind blew. Clouds covered the stars and the moon. As the night enfolded me in darkness a plan began to form in my mind...