

Year B Palm Sunday St. Mary's Eversley 25th March 2018

Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118:19-end

Mark 11:1-11

In France, we could have been held hostage and shot in our local supermarket this week.

In America, at the very least we've possibly had our social media hijacked and our news-feed manipulated for political gain, even if our children have survived their schooling.

Here, at home, there has been poison on our streets, and we're defining our borders as to whether they are hard, or soft.

Security is important to us.

As an island nation, or a nation of islands, or even as a nation of nations, invaded by sea over millennia and threatened by myriad other means in the last century, what we deem as "ours" is a highly contentious issue, and that's before we even mention the 'B' word.

Security, is often about not risking what we have gained, corporately or individually, financially and materially, in independence or in familial relationships. It means checking that we're password protected, logging-in, opting out, and possibly even changing our passports!

For some, personal security is about not being bullied, threatened or abused, because of race, religion, gender or because you are differently-abled.

For Christians, personal security in some places is more an issue of life and death. In India, a woman converting to Christianity risks being drugged and raped if she refuses to return to her original faith. In Iraq Christians are torn between the risk of death in their homeland, or life without that homeland. Either that or they worship in a church with its own security guards. In rebel-held areas of Syria, security might mean living underground to avoid the shells, or it might mean not admitting you're a Christian; that's a freedom only available in bombarded Damascus and other government-held territory. Security you see is not a simple issue.

For Jesus, as he asked his disciples for a colt to be untied and brought to him, in his name as their Lord, any ideas of protecting his security, or theirs for that matter, were dismissed. He'd tried, somewhat cryptically according to Mark's Gospel, to explain who he was; and then told those that seemed to understand, not to talk about it (Mark 8:27-30)! He knew the leaders of his faith were out to get him, and the Gentiles to make whatever political capital they could from this perceived in-fighting within the Jewish faith (Mark 10:32-34). But it was now time for the Messianic secret to be so no longer. This time when he visited

Jerusalem, he wouldn't walk among the pilgrims as an ordinary Galilean as he had in the past (John 7:10).

But that didn't mean he could afford to be diffident in proclaiming exactly who he was, what sort of Messiah he was, and what sort of victory would be his. As the rich man discovered when he sought to follow Jesus (Mark 10), Jesus had radically re-defined what it was to be Israel's king. The colt that had never been ridden was a humble king's conveyance, for when the message was peace, not war. But it still singled him out, made him noticeable, drew attention to him, compromised his security.

He had after all developed quite a following; a following who'd seen the healings, heard the teachings, and thought they knew what he was there for; to save them. They weren't bothered about risking his security, if in doing so it bought them their freedom from oppression and injustice at the hands of Rome. They were more than happy to draw attention to him, by laying their precious pilgrim cloaks in the dusty road for him to ride over as a king. They were just as willing to strip the locality of its vital shady greenery to mark him out as being in the same mould as Judas Maccabaeus who had driven out a Syrian king 140 years before, and re-consecrated the Temple.

Psalm 118 had probably been written in that same era. Read as it would have been said in the Hebrew and Aramaic the phraseology of "Blessed in the name of the Lord, is he who comes" was both a traditional greeting to all fellow pilgrims, and shouted in this moment an announcement of the "One who is Coming", the Messiah. Their expectation was that this was the renewal of the kingdom of David, and aligned with the shouted phrase Hosanna, which meant "Save us!" more than it praised God, meant that Jesus' security was compromised still further. It would have been obvious to the authorities, Jewish and Roman that they at least thought of him as their national leader in the fervour of pre-Passover excitement; now was the time for God to bring them salvation from oppression, personal and national security.

Yet, this Kingdom was no more their father David's, than he was a heroic and victorious leader. The salvation that Jesus was bringing was no more theirs to covert and protect, than it was theirs to proclaim if they didn't really understand the consequences for both Jesus, and for the kingdom that he was really seeking to bring in. For as the Son of God, his place was God's place, his kingdom, God's kingdom, the salvation he brought a surrender of his own right to life, his sacrifice the opportunity to bring the world together in peace. Security for Jesus, as he surprisingly quietly walked the Temple courts, was a security in who he was and what he was there for; the redemption, the buying back, of the whole of humanity from their fixation with their own security.

We are, to some extent rightly, concerned with our security, as people, as families, as communities. It is not unfair to expect to be safe when shopping, secure online, free from the risk of sabotage, even if there are many millions in the world don't have that security. But just as we need to acknowledge that the world is not a straightforward place where one

group of people is right, and another wrong, one nation safe and another a risky place to be, so we must accept that where we live here, we aren't at significant risk because of our faith in who Jesus is. But does that lack of risk compromise the security of our faith in Jesus, who he is, and what he came for?

The pilgrim crowds that shouted "Hosanna!... Save me!", were the same crowds that shouted "Crucify him!" a few days later. Uncertain as to whether Jesus was who he purported to be, confused because his behaviour did not confirm to their idealistic picture of Israel's Messiah, and with minds narrowed by a selfish desire for their own political freedom, they were easily swayed by those that feared an invasion of the traditions of their faith. The need for security expressed by a few, blinded the many to the goodness and mercy of their God (Psalm 118:29) revealed in human form, crucifying what hope he had held for them.

If we aren't secure in our faith in who Jesus is revealed to be through his death and resurrection, there's a danger that we too become hypocrites, turning our proclamation of Christ the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22) into a search for prosperity (Psalm 118:25) and the security of a pilgrimage that leaves us tied to an altar of our own making (Psalm 118:27), rather than his teaching and example.

Our task this Holy Week is therefore to refresh and renew the security of our faith, and not to allow ourselves to become distracted by the individualism of our society. It is a week of pilgrimage beside our Lord, that shares on Maundy Thursday in the refreshment of shared relationships without condemnation of those who doubt like Thomas, or could turn rogue like Judas. We may not physically carry Jesus's cross of sacrifice, but as we encounter the nails that held him there, we can seek again to let go of what is "ours" for the sake of our neighbours who need to encounter the grace of the crucified Christ... our time, our money, our patterned lives, and our prejudices. Only if we can strip away the security of isolating ourselves from the suffering of others, and our Lord who suffered with and for them as well as us, will we be able to rightly encounter the freedom of our risen Lord, and the security of knowing him as our Saviour.