

13 March 2016

JUNIORS

On the Sunday before Easter, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a little donkey. Do you remember how the people threw their coats down for the donkey to walk on? Do you remember how the people waved palm branches and shouted 'Hosanna'? Here is a picture of what it must have looked like. See how well you can colour it in.



SENIORS: More no-bodies whom Jesus loved: Luke 18:35 - 19:10



In the last couple of weeks of his life, Jesus set out bravely towards Jerusalem. He knew what would happen to him there and told his disciples all the details. They didn't want to hear this and tried to discourage him from going there. In the end they went with him, feeling vaguely scared and probably very confused. But even during this stressful time Jesus cared about others.

The road to Jerusalem passed nearby the city of Jericho. At the side of the road there, a blind beggar had taken up his position. There were no jobs for blind people; all he could do was find a good place and sit and beg. Possibly he had chosen this place because at that time of year lots of people were passing by on their way to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. He hoped that they would be keen to be holy as then they would give him quite generous donations.

He heard the footsteps of the crowd, got ready to beg and then sensed that something was different today. I imagine him tugging at the hem of someone's cloak, saying "What's going on? Why is this crowd so big? Hey! Listen to me! What is happening?" Eventually someone told him that they were gathering to see Jesus of Nazareth passing by.

Immediately, the blind man was alert. He had heard that this Jesus was no ordinary man. The blind man decided that he wasn't going to let his chance for help just pass by. So he began to yell, shouting over the noise of the crowd: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" How embarrassing this was for the people next to him, how unpleasant his yelling was – the people near him tried to shut him up. But, nothing doing! He wasn't going to keep quiet. This was his moment to be healed. He began to shout even louder.

And Jesus heard. He heard the desperate yells, but I think he also heard the man's faith. So Jesus stopped and asked them to bring the blind man to him. Suddenly the man felt an arm on his shoulder. "OK. You can keep quiet now. Jesus has asked for you. Come. We shall lead you to him." Imagine his excitement!

Then he heard Jesus' quiet voice saying, "What do you want me to do for you?". I expect that the blind man could hardly splutter out the answer: "Lord, let me see again." And suddenly he could see Jesus there in front of him. Because he had believed that Jesus wasn't just an ordinary man, he was healed. And from that day on, Luke tells us, he followed Jesus and praised God. I am sure he did not join in the shout of "Crucify!" when Jesus went on trial. He knew this was God at work!

But he wasn't the only one to discover Jesus there in Jericho. All this commotion made another man curious. He came out of his home to see what was going on, but the crowd was so thick and he was so short that he could not see a thing. And because he was a hated tax collector, no-one would let him through. I suspect they pushed him back – what did he want to see Jesus for? Jesus, they thought, wouldn't be interested in him.

Zacchaeus was very determined man and wasn't put off. He saw a sycamore tree at the side of the road, hitched his cloak up higher with his belt and then began to climb. Jesus was nearly there. I'm sure he didn't realise that this was going to be the best thing he had ever done. Jesus came and stopped right under the tree. To Zacchaeus' surprise, he called him by name: "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today." Other people were probably fed-up. Didn't Jesus realise Zacchaeus was a crook, a sinner, a tax-collector? I am sure Zacchaeus nearly fell down the tree with excitement. Someone actually wanted to stay with him! He probably also spluttered and choked with excitement as he led Jesus to his home.

There, Jesus and he had a long private conversation. We don't know what Jesus said, but we do know that Zacchaeus was a changed man. He felt loved and wanted. And in turn he reacted with great love – he announced that all he wanted now was to follow Jesus. He gave away half of his possessions to the poor, he paid back 4x what he had taken wrongly in taxes. No need for possessions now – he had Jesus' friendship.

So two men from Jericho: one rich, one poor; one healthy, one blind; both desperate to see Jesus, both rejected by their fellows, both discovered God's love and knew they wanted to follow Jesus.

In the stories we have studied this term, the people Jesus met with were excited, ecstatic and over the moon with delight that God loved them. Jesus makes it clear that we too are loved. As we celebrate Easter over 2000 years later, we can also glow (or splutter!) with the excitement of knowing that the Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, loves us, knows us by name and will bring us more happiness than anything else ever can – all our lives and on to eternity.

Can you unscramble this message?

sJuse evlso em siht I wnko rof eth eBilb sllte emo s. ettil sneo ot mHi gnoelb. Yhet ear kawe tub eH si gsrtno. seY ssJeu sveol em!