

28th March 2021 – Palm Sunday

Climbing

“Fain I would climb, yet fear I to fall.”

Sir Walter Raleigh, A line written on a window-pane

No one could have dreamed that Holy Week would be like this. After the unexpected readjustments we had to make to our systems, worship and practices last year, here we are, twelve months on, still struggling with the pandemic and having to “rethink” Holy Week once more.

I’ve been doing my own rethinking. And in each “Thought for the Day” over the next eight days I’m going to examine our Holy Week journey in a different way, and that begins now, on the day we call Palm Sunday.

When I was on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land several years ago, like many pilgrims before me, we travelled, mile after mile, up the sandy hills and scrubland from Jericho, through the lowest point on the face of the earth in the Judean desert, climbing all the way. Halfway up, we reached sea level. We’d already climbed a long way from the Jordan valley, and we still had a fair bit of climbing to go. It was hot in a landscape where it seldom rains. It was dry and dusty. And it was *very* long.

This was the way the ancient pilgrims came to Jerusalem. And Jesus, on a journey into the city riding on the back of a donkey, would be well aware of that. The procession he undertook would have had a much deeper significance for him and his salvation story than we can ever imagine. This was no short journey as it may have seemed to the crowds. This was long and weary. This was no fun procession accompanied by cheering and palm-branch-waving on a Spring afternoon. This was a serious business. This was no downhill run, coasting gently to arrive safely at the destination. This was a climb of pilgrimage, and a hard one at that.

We’re on the final leg of our Easter pilgrimage this year. We *should* take it seriously. We *should* struggle with the climb. We *should* be weary. The journey through Lent has been long and arduous, and so it should have been. We will arrive safely. But only when the journey’s been completed, and we’ve tramped the pilgrim road to the end, and kept our eye fixed on our goal – the glory and the triumph of the Easter rising.

A prayer for today

*Lord, I wanted this part to be downhill. But there’s still a hard road to take.
Give me the strength to keep going, and to see it through to the end. Amen.*

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