

THROUGH CHILDREN'S EYES: PALM SUNDAY

At first glance it would seem our artist Julia, aged 8, has given us a literal view of Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem but in her simplicity she hides many of the clues of Holy Week. Yes Jesus is riding on a colt. Yes the roads are strewn with large leafy palm branches. Yes the built-up area of Jerusalem rise up on the right and loom over the scene making it clear this is a transition from a barren journey into an urban setting. The sun beams bright overhead and even the arrow by Jesus' name points him into the city and on to the venture that lays before in this City of David, the one that the gospel writers Matthew (27:37) and Luke (13:34) call "the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"

In her work, Julia reveals other complex aspects of Holy Week. There are no pressing crowds; only one solitary watcher greets Jesus. Where are the others to chant "Hosanna" and "Hail King"? With none present this Jesus is already abandoned. The others have already fled into hiding and Jesus is alone to be arrested with only one watcher to record and evangelize the incident. Not only are palm branches on the road, but the trees have been stripped bare. Nature is bereft, exposed and already ravaged by what is to happen. The solitary tree has been stripped and brutalized just as the Messiah will be stripped and brutalized. Julia has presented an already naked Jesus; prepared for the arrest and abuse.

Craftily Julia also builds into her work the hoped for resurrection and renewal that Jesus will bring to all the world. To our eyes, the sun still shines on the bad as well as on the good (Matthew 5:45). The dome of the sky, which God struggled to lift up in Genesis 1: 6-8, still shines blue. The tree of life, the Branch of Jesse still grows green with the remnant which will flourish again, like the new Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 45:7), like the house of Judah spreading forth new life from Jerusalem in 2 Kings 19 30-31, like the preserved house of Jacob in Isaiah 10: 20-21, like those grafted onto the root of Jesse in Isaiah 10: 10-11. Deutero-Isaiah 37: 31-32 foretold "the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward; for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out..."

The image of this remnant bringing restored life after death is a powerful image throughout the Bible: in Jeremiah 50:20, Ezekiel 11:13, Amos 5:15 and Micah 2:12. Perhaps God's restorative compassion and steadfast love is best expressed by Micah 7:18 who exclaims, "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? God does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency." Julia has all this in the life-filled promise of the bruised green branches and the hope-filled arrival of sacrificial lamb, Jesus the Christ.

Here is the age appropriate scripture for this Sunday upon which Julia has based her work:

20 MARCH – PALM SUNDAY

After Jesus left the house of Mary and her brother, Lazarus, and their older sister, Martha, he headed towards the capital city of Jerusalem. He was going to the capital city to tell the religious authorities that they needed to change their ways and work more for the poor and hungry and to lead in good church worship for all people.

This was a dangerous time to bring this challenging message. There was a big festival about to happen called Passover. There would be many many tourists in the city and there were extra police and soldiers on duty to stop pickpockets, hooligans or folks who might excite the crowds against the hard Roman rulers who had taken over the land.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, he decided to do so in a fancy meaningful way. He came riding on a donkey because in the oldest part of the bible it says that God's true representative will come riding into Jerusalem on a foal, the child of a donkey. He did this because he wanted the religious authorities to see him, make the connection, and listen to him.

When he came into town, many people saw him and thought he was coming to kick out the mean Roman government. They thought this was a sign that Jesus was coming to make himself their new king and to stage a revolution and take over. They started yelling "Hail Jesus, King of the Jews!" and also "Hosanna to the Highest, Hosanna". Hosanna means "rescue" or "save" and it was unclear whether they wanted Jesus to save them from the religious leaders or from the Roman government. People began to strip bark off of the trees to lay a royal carpet on the road. They also laid down

many many large leaves of the palm trees and even their coats and headscarves to make a kingly carpet for the donkey to ride upon. There was a lot of yelling and cheering and singing... and there was Jesus riding into the city on a donkey.

The worried religious leaders were not happy.

The angry Roman governor was not happy.

The police and soldiers were not happy.

Many said something has to be done about this Jesus from Nazareth. He is exciting the people too much.

Some started to think that Jesus had to die in order to stop him. "Better that he die, in order to keep the peace and keep things the same." Some of them muttered to themselves.

