

Bad news and good news!

I love reading and enjoy most kinds of books - whereas Roger likes reading thrillers and detective books. When he's finished a book, he passes it onto me - and provided that they've got a fast moving plot with believable characters I enjoy reading them. I like trying to work out what's going to happen and who did what - so if Roger was to tell me what happened in the end I would be extremely annoyed and put the book away. I'm not someone who reads the last page of a book first so that they know what's going to happen in the story. If I know the ending, all the anticipation and excitement is taken away.



On Palm Sunday, we enter the story of Holy Week and Easter yet again. The familiar story that we hear year after year is a story to which we know the ending - after a happy beginning things go downhill. There's betrayal, sadness, death and destruction and then the ending to beat all endings when the hero reappears having defeated death and surprises all his friends. The problem that I have, and I guess many of you have is that because we know the ending, we lose sight of the anticipation and excitement of the story. It's not that the plot is predictable or easy to anticipate - for us it's the problem of hindsight.

We know that Palm Sunday's jubilation was followed by the despair of Good Friday. We know that the seeming failure of Good Friday was quickly overtaken by the triumph of the first Easter Day. Hindsight is supposed to be beneficial - but in the case of the Easter story it robs us of the possibility of living through the events as they happened.

What was going through the disciple's minds as they came into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday? What was Jesus feeling as he rode into Jerusalem on that donkey? Our danger is that knowing the outcome we minimise the intensity of the events and feelings of Holy Week because we know it turned out OK in the end.

What was Jesus feeling as he entered Jerusalem knowing what the week ahead would hold? Was he already feeling that overwhelming sense of loneliness that comes when we are completely misunderstood. How many times had he told his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem to die? How often had they failed to hear what he said?

Palm Sunday dramatises for us the chasm in understanding which existed between Jesus and everyone around him. While his disciples and the happy shouting crowds were welcoming their king, Jesus was alone. Really alone - no one understood what he was doing - no one grasped what was about to happen!

When we talk of Christ's suffering - we think primarily of the Cross. We miss the agony of the anticipation, the loneliness that Jesus felt throughout the last week of his life. The shame of abandonment and torture. And because we miss his anguish we minimise the significance of many of the events of that last week. With the benefit of hindsight we rush on to the resurrection - to the good news and the nice celebrations.

Maybe this is because we don't like bad news, we don't like sadness, pain and agony and so we don't come to church during Holy Week because we want to ignore this part of the story. However, the good news of Easter Day, only fully makes sense if we have also made ourselves face the bad news. Only then can we fully appreciate what Jesus did for us – that he entered the depths of pain and anguish out of love for us. It's only by living through Holy Week, that we can fully realise that Jesus really and truly understands the pain and suffering that we face in our lives and can minister to us in our dark places.

There is something happening at church every day during Holy Week - and each service will help us through words, images and music to relive, to re-imagine the story of that first Holy Week. I would urge you to come along to each service - and if you can't get transport but would like to come then please let someone know and we'll see what we can do to

help get you there. Do take this opportunity to live through Holy Week, but as we do this, let's not get too far ahead of the plot anticipating the final outcome. Instead, let us, to the best of our ability, stay with the story watching and feeling it unfold day by day.