

“How do we enter the city?” a sermon based on Matthew 21:1-11 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Palm Sunday 9 April 2017,

In January we saw on the news, film of the Iraqi army preparing to enter Mosul in Syria, to drive out Isis. Soldiers in army trucks. Hummer type vehicles carrying weapons and soldiers moving in convoy across the sand. And when they got close to the city, using heavy artillery to fire guns into Isis held buildings, somewhat indiscriminately. And of planes bombing parts of the city to ready the city, to soften it in order to subdue it. It was organised, violent, determined, ready, to soften in order to subdue the city.

An image of a city being entered.

A friend was a young girl when the Soviet Army invaded Budapest in 1956. Her house was close to the headquarters of the Secret Police so she grew up in a home that always felt on the edge. They had a hiding place below the floor boards. Over forty years later she could describe what it felt like – the sound of the tanks rolling through the streets, the shouting of soldiers, the fear, the terror, the hiding under the floor boards in case the Soviets broke down the front door.

An image of a city being entered.

My ancestors described the British soldiers invading the Waikato. Our Presbyterian ancestors described the Police arresting Rua Kenana at Maungapohatu.

Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg ask us to imagine Pilate entering on one side of Jerusalem as Jesus entered from the other side. For security and crowd-control at Passover, Pilate came up to Jerusalem with extra troops from his base at Caesarea on the coast.

This is how they describe it ...

"A visual panoply of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armour, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. Sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of

leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful."

And he was not just any human.

According to Roman imperial belief, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome; he was the Son of God, the saviour of the world. For the empire's Jewish subjects, Pilate's procession signalled more than a military threat. It embodied a theology.

Imagine the entry of Jesus on the other side of the city.

To make some money, I worked after school in Rod Nicholson's butcher shop. Meat and eels hanging from hooks. Sawdust on the floor. Frozen display in the shop window. I was to deliver the meat on a black bike with a wicker basket in the front, to help keep the shop tidy, to sweep the sawdust, to clean up at the end of the day. And one afternoon, as I worked there, I saw through the clear glass window circus trucks go past. Involuntarily I let out a shout – "look at that!" And all the customers looked at me and wondered what kind of a strange person I was. But the circus did not come to town very often and the prospect of being able to see it and to go to it, I was overwhelmed by joy.

On one side of the city, the army; on the other side, the circus – a man on a donkey.

It was more deliberate though, a counter procession, street theatre.

Imagine, say Crossan and Borg, as Pilate clanged and crashed his imperial way into Jerusalem from the west, Jesus approached from the east, looking (by contrast) ragtag and absurd. His was the procession of the ridiculous, the powerless, the explicitly vulnerable.

An anti-imperial, anti-triumphal entry, a mocking of the conquering emperor entering a city on horseback through gates opened in abject submission."

He rode the most unthreatening, most un-military mount imaginable: a female nursing donkey with her little colt trotting along beside her.

Drawing on the rich, prophetic symbolism of the Jewish Scriptures. The prophet Zechariah predicted the ride of a king "on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The animal that princes rode when they wanted to signify peaceful intentions.

Peace, not by violence, but by theatre, by a renewed imagination, a different way of seeing.

A different kingdom, and it set the trajectory for the week ahead ... humbling to the point of crucifixion, bumbling disciples not really keeping up.

That is how he came to me, through unlikely ordinary people, who came alongside me.

And what does the story ask of us in our colleges, our workplaces, our city?

When people know I am the minister of Knox, very often, and it happened again last Friday night, they will name a Knox person they know, or they will describe the person, and what that person means to them.

What people notice is who they are as a person, how they care, how they treat people, how they relate to people, how that is worked out in their professional life and personal relationships.

People are interested in our donkey lives, how we live out the way of Jesus Christ, the humble way, the way of the Cross.

Who we are alongside people ...

The Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs was consulting a small group of people about how Australia might engage Papua New Guinea more effectively. Business and banks argued that PNG needed more Australians in senior roles. The church said that its way was to support local leadership, not to take it over.

The donkey way.

It is that way that takes us alongside people in our community, alongside our neighbours, alongside groups for justice and peace, alongside others in our rugby team or Bridge Club.

The donkey way.

In Ashburton local shops agreed to feature a symbol of Easter in their windows. It was easy for the wine shop and also for the beauty salon, a bowl with a towel. But the local petrol station would not agree to put up a sign that said “any ass can stop here”. No said the owner. My customers will think I am insulting them.

Any ass can stop here.

That is the nature of the Jesus movement. Not a processing disciplined army, more a bumbling circus, people trying to support each other on the journey amid all their mistakes, a ragbag, motley crew of people who sometimes get it and often do not, journeying to Jerusalem, ordinary folk relating to ordinary folk.

More like a circus, a bunch of asses.

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***growing in courage to live the Jesus way***



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