

## March 24 ASC PALM SUNDAY GGW

I know this is probably not easy to do but for a moment try clear your mind of the events which the church celebrates later this week: there is no Maundy Thursday or Passover celebration; there is no Good Friday or crucifixion; and there is no Easter and resurrection.

Now think that you are living in or near Jerusalem and have left your homes to go and see the arrival of the itinerant preacher who has been the talk of the neighborhood for some time. We are going to see Jesus of Nazareth who has been reported to have changed water into wine; healed the blind and other disabled people including lepers; fed thousands with very little; and even raised Lazarus from the dead. He has also preached a message of hope telling us that the poor will be rich and the last will be first among other things. Some are

even calling him a king. His arrival was a peasant procession with Jesus riding on a donkey as had been foretold by Zechariah. This king, riding on a donkey, will banish war from the land—no more chariots, war horses, cavalry or bows. He would be the king of peace. This arrival in Jerusalem was a dramatic event which was well planned and choreographed so that none would fail to see that Jesus was making the claim that he was the Messiah, God's Anointed King. This was an act of defiance and also an act of courage because Jesus and others would have known that he had a price on his head as an outlaw.

As a side note--I read that an ass in Palestine was not a lowly beast but rather a noble one. Horses were used at times of war but the donkey was used when a king came in peace.

This is a person I think any of us would want to see and meet. I might also have in my mind that this is a person who will lead to a world which was no longer ruled by the temple priests in cooperation with the Imperial Roman state. There was to be a war but it was not a bloody one: it would be a war for the hearts and minds of the people.

There is something else which would be happening at this time in Jerusalem. There probably was another grand entrance from another direction of the entourage of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. They would have arrived with the cavalry showing the great strength of Roman Empire. There would be foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, and beating of drums. This procession showed the power of the

emperor who was considered by Romans to be the Son of God.

Now I know that you cannot completely blot out the events of the week so I will add that there was a reason for the arrival of Pontius Pilate. Because the Passover Feast was the remembrance of an event which ended the slavery of Jews in Egypt, there was always the possibility that trouble might happen in the city of Jerusalem and the extra presence of Roman troops would be on hand to quell any disturbance.

In the end, there was bound to be problems because there were dueling claims to the title of Son of God. Jerusalem would be the epicenter of this conflict. It was a city of God and a faithless city; it was a city of hope and a city of oppression; and it was a city of joy and a city of great pain.

As we begin our journey into this Holy Week we must be prepared for the confrontation.

On a personal level, I think as individuals we too are always conflicted. We are always faced with the reality of the world around us and the hope of what the world could be. We are conflicted as to who we view ourselves to be and who we would like to be.

Jesus is pretty sure his days are numbered as he enters Jerusalem and he is prepared to face the encounter with authorities who will silence him. But he also says that if his message would be squelched and his disciples silenced, the stones would cry out. Let us not make it necessary in our time for the stones to speak. Amen.