

Palm Sunday Reflection 2024 'Who we are, who He is.'

My grandfather was an interesting and difficult man. He was a gas-fitter by trade who raised his family in a small terraced home in Tooting. But he had a keen mind and lifelong love of poetry. He was, you might say, an ordinary philosopher, who would often sit in his chair and muse on life.

He tried to instil a love of poetry into me, though I used to dread him sitting me down and reading me Hiawatha or endless Rudyard Kipling! But I do remember him often talking about the events of Easter. He confessed to being a lifelong sceptic, but he would always go on to say:

'If I had been there, Matt, if I had been there: if I had stood on that hill watching him die, would I have believed? Would I have believed?'

He never answered that question directly – at least not to me. But, as, **this week**, we hear again the Easter story, this story of all stories, as we run our hands over its well-known contours, as we hear the cowardice of the disciples, the anger of the Pharisees, the self-interest of Pilate, the herd mentality of the crowd, deep down most of us know the answer to my grandad's question. The truth is that for most of us, it would have been No. We would not have believed – at least, not then, at that moment. We'd have followed the crowd, just like everybody else.

If Easter teaches us anything, it teaches us to have a healthy humility about our human nature. The same people who cheered Jesus arriving in Jerusalem as the longed-for king, who waved branches and laid their coats on the road, who hung on his every word in the temple, were the same people shouting for his death a few days later. They followed the disciples on Palm Sunday and the Pharisees on Friday morning. Less than a week changed everything. Crowds are fickle. *We* are fickle.

The thing is with Easter, as it always is in the end, is not to wonder whether we would have been more heroic than the cast of motley characters in this story. Rather, Easter forces us to face again what we truly are – weak and selfish people, whose only hope is the wild, extravagant, *dangerous* love and mercy of God. Dangerous enough to get him killed. Extravagant enough to forgive his tormentors as he died. Wild enough to overcome everything that his own creatures could throw at him.

And as we recognise who and what we are, we come to see again just how amazing God is, how awesome is the love of Christ. There *is* hope in this story. But it's not hope in our capacity for heroism or self-improvement. *We* are the people in this story – we always have been. We are the disciples criticising the woman who anointed Jesus, the friends who fall asleep on the watch, the ones who make great protestations of loyalty and run away when trouble comes. We are Pilate, desperate to do whatever is necessary for a quiet life. We are Peter, brave enough to follow to the courtyard and scared enough to pretend we don't know who Jesus really is. We are Barabbas, set free so that the one innocent in all of history suffers and dies in our place.

Our only hope is the unquenchable love of God, a love supreme which led him to do all that for us, unworthy as we are. Jesus knows what we're like. But he loves us anyway.

In the end, I have come to believe that my granddad was simply asking the right question at the wrong time. It's not: 'would I have believed then?' But 'do I believe *now*?' Can I face the truth about myself, and cast myself again on the wild, extravagant and dangerous love and mercy of God? My hope and prayer is that Easter this year will once again lead us all to the truth of who we are, yes: but more than that, to the truth of *who He is*. He is our hope. He is our joy. He is our life.