**Thought for the Week beginning 5th April**

Hello Everyone,

This is the third Sunday of the lockdown. Perhaps you have settled into a comfortable routine. Maybe you have itchy feet and are getting restless. This week’s reading,   [Matthew, chapter 21, verses 1-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+21%3A1-11&version=CEV), is set in the heaving city of Jerusalem when the city’s population was increased substantially by pilgrims cramming into the narrow streets coming to celebrate the Passover Festival. No social distancing here!

The events of Holy Week are set entirely in and around Jerusalem and at a time of considerable political and religious conflict. You have to imagine the tension and the highly charged atmosphere. The pilgrims were making a political statement by there presence in the city as much as a religious one, for here was the centre of the hated Roman rule come face to face with radical Jews demanding their freedom.

I don’t know if you have ever been caught up in a crowd. I’ve been to a few football matches in my time and when rival teams are drawn together you can sense that one incident could ignite violence. You get drawn along, often in a direction you don’t want to go.  On one occasion I remember opposing gangs of supporters clashed and my friends and I got caught up in it; it was the most frightening thing I have experienced.

Jerusalem has not changed that much since Jesus’ time. If you go there today its still a place where tension is part of everyday life.  It’s the capital of two peoples, Jews and Palestinians; it’s a shrine for three faiths Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Someone once described the city as the history of heaven and earth. It was an extraordinary place when Jesus was walking its streets and it still in today. Political and religious tension is very close to the surface.

And into this cauldron comes Jesus.

Verse 10: When Jesus entered Jerusalem, all the city was filled with excitement. The people asked ‘Who is this man?’

Verse 11: The crowd answered, this is Jesus, the prophet from the town of Nazareth in Galilee’.

At the start of a football match the crowd is expectant, wanting their team to win, but things can change quickly if the game goes against them and what they had hoped for doesn’t materialise. They turn against the players and the manager and things get ugly. I’ve seen it many times.

And so it was for Jesus. He wasn’t the warrior king that they expected, their champion to rid them of the brutal Roman government. The story of Holy Week, that we now enter, is one that turns from celebrations and festivities to betrayal and brutality, but ultimately triumph. But throughout this week, in circumstances that are very far from normal, we can reflect quietly on the sacrifice of Jesus and remember also the sacrifices that others make to keep us safe at this time.

Have a special Holy Week and make yourselves ready for Easter Day.

Rodney