

MEDITATION FOR PALM SUNDAY at 10am | 09.04.2017

My mind has been turning over and over with the thoughts of the young father in Syria who lost 22 members of his extended family – including two eighteen month old twins – in that desperate gas attack earlier this week.

What could he have said to the Turkish President at their meeting except to say how totally empty he felt? In terms of bereavement it is impossible for us to imagine what he is going through.

Today's Palm Sunday Mass is full of stories – glimpses of people caught up in events that we call Holy Week. Confused and angry disciples, jealous Jews watching Jesus' feet being bathed in perfume, animal traders in the Temple caught off-guard, a widow pointed out by Jesus for her generosity. It's a huge canvass with lots going on.

Into the middle of a very ordinary Passover festival, Jesus comes like a whirl-wind. Everything he does has a meaning for those who know about these things: unriden donkeys, stories about tenants in a vineyard, creating mayhem in the Temple as a sign that its days were numbered, setting up a final meal: at every point he upsets everyone's ideas of what should be happening and leaves them bewildered.

And the only one who really knows, really understands what all these actions mean is Jesus. He has planned all this drama, right down to the last detail of the donkey being ready for the James and John to pick up.

He is the calm in the middle of the storm.

And yet he is the one who is going to suffer most. How could he be so calm and collected?

Because he knew that only by his humbly accepting this role could you and ever see what God is like – and what the human race could and should be like.

One of Tim Rice’s lyrics for Jesus Christ Superstar begins: “what’s the fuss, what is a happening...?”

And in Holy Week lots is happening and we can easily get drowned in all the background static. Somehow we need to take time out to look at the details – not so much at what Jesus said but what he did – and with whom.

So my invitation this week is that you find time to re-read today’s pew sheet, quietly on our own, taking the chance to look again at the eight little episodes and see how they all come together to make a picture of why Jesus set his mind single-mindedly on facing down his enemies in Jerusalem.

And I suspect you will find, like me, that it is all done in seemingly inconsequential encounters with otherwise invisible people: the complete turn-around of the cheating tax-collector Zacchaeus, the attention paid to the widow who gives away all that she has, the celebration of Mary anointing his feet and finally his instructions that the disciples should celebrate the great Freedom festival of Passover together.

There is no ‘instant guide to being a good Christian’. It doesn’t exist. What we have instead are examples of what happens when people discover the real Jesus, and begin to put his principles into practice.

Instead of getting sucked into their ‘busyness’ - their bundles of half-fulfilled hopes and ambitions, all wrapped around with a good dose of pragmatic cynicism, Jesus offers this alternative: *what if we love other people enough to give up our lives for them. What difference would that make?*

I hope that someone, somewhere, is doing that for Abdel Hameed Alyousef, the bereaved father, in Syria.

