

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/

© Chris Haslam

John 12:12-16

NRSV

The “next day” (v. 12) after Mary has anointed Jesus with oil usually applied before burial, “the great crowd” of his supporters among the pilgrims visiting Jerusalem for the Passover hear that Jesus is coming. So, as when Simon freed the land from foreign control in 140 BC, the crowd goes out to greet Jesus with “branches of palm trees” (v. 13, 1 Maccabees 13:51).

Crowds waved palm fronds while singing Psalm 118 at the Feast of Tabernacles. Here they shout a verse from it, to which they add “The King of Israel” (v. 13), showing that they expect Jesus to restore the kingdom of David. “In the name of” means *with the authority of*. “Hosanna” means *please save* or *save us*.

In John, unlike in the other gospels, the crowd takes the initiative: “they ... went out to meet him”; Jesus’ response is simply to sit on “a young donkey” (v. 14). A war-like king would have ridden a horse. Thus he fulfils an expectation from the Old Testament: v. 15 is taken from Zephaniah 3:16 and Zechariah 9:9. A “donkey’s colt” is its foal. “His disciples did not understand” (v. 16) how Jesus could be a king in any sense if he was not the messiah, an ideal earthly king, as popularly expected. After the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost they made sense to them

Psalm 118:1-2,19-29

NRSV

Vv. 1-2 are a call to thanksgiving: God’s mercy, his “steadfast love”, is everlasting. May “Israel” (v. 2) (and) “those who fear the Lord” (v. 4) proclaim this! Vv. 5-13 say that, when the psalmist (possibly the king) was in distress, he “called on the LORD”, who heard him. With God on his side, there is nothing to fear; trusting in God is better than trusting in humans. Surrounded by his enemies, “in the name of the LORD I cut them off” (v. 11), with God’s help. V. 15 recalls Exodus 15:2a, part of Israel’s classic victory song sung by Moses and the Israelites after crossing the Reed (Red) Sea. The “glad songs” are heard in the Temple, the community of the faithful. The psalmist expects to live to old age (v. 17); he will proclaim God’s acts of power. He has suffered greatly at God’s hands, as a discipline, but God has preserved his life. He seeks entrance to the Temple (“gates of righteousness”, v. 19) to give thanks; only the godly may enter therein (v. 20). V. 22, possibly based on an ancient proverb, may speak of the king’s rise to power or of his victory. On this day (v. 24) God has either saved his people or punished the ungodly – or both. This is a time for rejoicing. In v. 26, all proclaim he who was “rejected” (v. 22), but is now God’s chosen ruler. Note the progression in vv. 26-29: “festal procession”, “extol” (raise up), everlasting love.