

Let the festival begin!

(Do you have your coat on the floor before you?)

Festivals are times when we celebrate - it usually involves eating and drinking and usually in a special place. So lets start by playing a game.

Here is the game - Write down the names of the people who are currently in your home. If you are alone at home - add 2 to 3 more names - you might like to pick members of your family who you would like to be with now.

I'm together with Petra and Miri so I've written our three names - Petra, Miri and Michael, and I'll add Seb - our son who is in Sydney.

Now using the letter of those names - see if you can come up with:

A Place - a special place you would like to have a festival/celebration in,

A Food - you would like to eat with those people

A drink - you would like to celebrate with

For exampleUsing the letter of the names that I have listed -

Place - Siberia or Paris or..... the one I liked most - Leimersheim, Ger.

Food - Pasta (Chili), and Drink - Beer (malt ?.....)

We could end up in an unexpected place for our festivals!

(I'll be interested to hear of your special place, food and drink)

The theme today is 'Let the festival Begin!'

Now there is no doubt about the festival in the story. Jesus and his disciples were going to an expected place - Jerusalem.

They would eat a passover lamb flat bread and bitter herbs - they would drink red wine and grape juice

But this particular festival was shaping up to be a little different for everyone because Jesus was coming to the festival Of course, he had been to the festival many times in his life. When he was a boy his parents took him there every yearin Luke 2 we read of a time when he was there at age 12. We know also that he went there as an adult, in John 7 we read of one such time. But this time was different, Jesus had become very popular - his teaching and his miracles made him famous -

there was a growing feeling that he was from God - indeed that he was God's promised special one - a person called the Messiah - the anointed one - a person who might bring good things for his people. Jesus was understood as a person of Hope, so that on this trip to Jerusalem, Jesus was surrounded by crowds!

He was the centre of their attention and the object of their hope. He encouraged their hope because he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey!

This encouraged them because there had been an ancient prophecy that God's promised special person would come into Jerusalem riding on a donkey ! Zechariah 9:9 - Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—

So the people shouted and they sang and they laid green branches and even their coats on the road before him

See your coat on the floor? Would you be happy to walk on it?? Maybe you would, because its in your own home. Here your feet are clean and so is your floor, therefore there would be no real harm to walk on your coat now, but would you lay your coat outside on a dirty path and then would you let another person walk on your coat with their dirty feet? Surely, you would think twice about that! BUT, if you held the other person in such high respect, if you would do anything to make their journey easier and less messy for them - then you might! And that is what the crowds thought that day! The crowds that day thought Jesus was special! And most people thought that 'this' Passover celebration would be something special because Jesus was there!

Even more special because it was '**the Passover**'. Lets for a moment remind ourselves of what the passover festival remembered, for in doing this we can appreciate the expectation that the crowd might have placed on Jesus.

The Passover remembered a time when the people of Israel were slaves in a foreign land. The passover festival remembered when God gave them deliverance - when God rescued them 'out from under' the control of a cruel tyranny to find peace in their own land.

This is important, for when Jesus entered Jerusalem on that passover the people of Israel were once again under the control of a cruel tyranny - the Tyranny of Rome. They longed for freedom, and so when Jesus rode that donkey into Jerusalem the crowd they placed their hope in Him. They hoped he would bring about a new deliverance - out from under the tyranny of Rome!

So Palm Sunday - the day we remember today is about HOPE.

Now hope is a good thing. If you have hope you can look ahead and make positive choices. If you have hope you can put up with hardships without losing your way. When people lose hope then they can get angry or sad. Sometimes they can just give up and waste their time in foolish pursuits ... even though they know those things are wrong.

I was glad to hear our politicians giving us Hope in our coronavirus time. They are not only trying to meet the challenge with strong messages of washing hands and spacial distance but they are also talking about financial supports to help us 'cross the bridge'. One day in 3- 6 months we will get to the other side of the 'Corona crisis bridge' and we can once again hug our friends had shake the hands of strangers. So don't lose hope. While we have HOPE we can accept hardships with dignity knowing that there will be an end!

There will be a day when I can eat chili pasta and drink beer with Seb and Miri and Petra in Leimersheim, Germany!

So enter this Easter week with Hope. And do not lose your hope. The first Easter week reminds us that the Hope which the people had was both right and wrong.....

They had a wrong idea of what Jesus would do for them.....
Wrong that He would not deliver them from the tyranny of Rome.

But they were **right** to hope in Jesus! He would deliver them, but from something bigger than 'little Rome'. He would deliver them from something that is a worry for all people and all time - the worry of our moral failures (our sins) and the worry of our death. The worry that God might be against us because of our failure to be good enough. On that Passover festival, Jesus would do the unexpected. He would die for all humanity so that we might have peace with God. The disciples of Jesus had to adjust their hope to see something bigger. They had to adjust their hope to see that Jesus was not just 'a' king of Israel but rather **The Lord of life and death for all time and for all people**. They had to learn to roll with Jesus as he led them through the uncertainty of life.....

We need to lean to roll with Jesus. Things might not be quite what we expected them to be but in the uncertainty of things - we can still be certain that God is in control.

God was in control when God made the world.

God was in control when humanity showed their cruel face.

God was in control when Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem.

And God was in control as that week ahead rolled differently.... towards the passion of Jesus and the cross.Let us roll with God in the uncertainties of life even the COVID19 uncertainties of life.

Take your names again and the letters can you see a word in there that God would have us follow if we were to roll with God even in difficult and uncertain days

I can see one in my list of names 'CARE'.

Jesus is Lord - let us live in hope, let us roll with him. What will that rolling look like? One thing, we will continue to CARE for each other. What word worth remembering can you find in the letters of your names. I'll look forward to finding our at our virtual morning tea or in your comments on our Eden UC Worship and Faith Conversations page.