

Who are you?

Anyone that knows me will be aware that this is a question I often have to ask, even if I've been around someone for quite a while. It has become a standing joke at work where one of my colleagues sent an email asking for access to a system and I sent a reply saying exactly that. He'd only been working in the same group as me for about 2 weeks.

However, this is a question that can go far deeper than just asking what your name is, it can also be a question that asks about what you do or believe. I'd today like to look at some of the people or groups of people that we meet on this trip up to Jerusalem, including some we didn't actually meet in our reading today but that are in Luke's narration of this event.

The first people I'd like to consider are the 2 disciples that are given these odd instructions at the beginning of our reading. They are instructed to go ahead of the main group, untie a donkey from a house in the village they will enter and bring it back to Jesus. What must have been going through their minds?

These people had, presumably, been with Jesus for a reasonable length of time, since they are called disciples. In all that time, we are never given the impression that Jesus had got about in any way other than walking or boat. Yet here he is, asking that they get him a donkey to ride.

Then there is the fact that the instruction appear to be asking them to purloin the donkey. They are not told to let the owner know that they have taken it. They are given a message for if they are asked about it, but it's quite ambiguous. We don't have enough detail in our reading to know whether this is the case or not, Jesus could have arranged all this in advance, but it does seem strange.

However, despite these instructions being so out of the ordinary, they did as Jesus requested. They answered as instructed and brought the colt to Jesus.

The second set of people are the villagers that questioned the disciples. They watched as 2 strangers to the village, in Yorkshire I guess we might call them offcumdons, came in and took a colt from outside a house. They question this, but then don't seem to be bothered to do anything further. As I said earlier, Jesus may have pre-arranged all this and this was the agreed upon pass-phrase, but it seems strange to me the apparent lack of care. They seem to have been content to stand off to the side and watch without taking any action.

We then come to the crowds on the road. This entry into Jerusalem was happening only a few days before the biggest annual festival in the Jewish calendar. The road into Jerusalem would have been packed with people making their way to celebrate. Into this crowd, Jesus rides, with his disciples around him. Jesus would by now have been quite a well known figure in the Jewish community and the crowd recognised him.

They begin to celebrate his arrival. Spreading your cloak on the ground in front of someone was a symbol of recognising them as royalty, the branches that would previously have been waved in celebration were placed to ease his journey. He was greeted in the words of our first reading from Psalm 118, a psalm of praise celebrating God's deliverance.

But even in this one crowd I suspect that there were several types of people. There would have been some that truly recognised Jesus as the delivery of the Jewish nation (as Jews they probably didn't worry too much about the delivery of anyone else). There would have been some that saw a party and joined in because, hey it's a party. There were likely those that didn't really want to join

in, but didn't want to stand out as going against the flow and so did what everyone else was doing. Finally, there would have been some that wanted nothing to do with it, trying to stay out of the way, hoping that they could get away with not getting involved.

The final group of people I would like to consider do not appear in Mark's account, but Luke tells us that "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples'" (Lk 19:39). Once again, the religious leaders thought Jesus was doing it wrong.

Maybe it was because he was being acclaimed as the one who comes in the name of the Lord and was doing nothing to disclaim it. Maybe it was that they were worried the Romans might see the shouting crowd as a risk and come down hard on the celebrating people, risking a riot just before their holy day. Maybe it was just that they hated Jesus for his frequent messages that they were not really following God. Maybe it was all of the above.

Whatever the reason, they want Jesus to stop this, to control his followers.

These were some of the responses that Jesus met in this one journey, but they are also the responses that Jesus receives today.

- There are some people that will hear God asking them to do something that sounds strange, and because it's Jesus asking they will do as they are asked.
- There are be some people that will appear to ask about what is going on, but they don't really want to get involved in any way.
- There are people that want to celebrate Jesus, probably the sort of people that would go to church, but even then there are subsets
 - The truly dedicated
 - The ones that want to belong
 - The hangers on
 - The reluctant
- There are people that oppose Jesus and, not only want nothing to do with him but want to stop others from following

This variety has always been the response to Jesus, and in fact everyone that hears about Jesus has to make a response and it will be one of these responses. What I want to ask as we end now though, is considering these groups, which one do you belong to? Or, to put it another way, Who are you?