## The promised King

On June 4, 1783 at the market square of a French village of Annonay, not far from Paris, a smoky bonfire on a raised platform was fed by wet straw and old wool rags. Tethered above, straining its lines, was a huge taffeta bag 33 feet in diameter. In the presence of “a respectable assembly and a great many other people,” and accompanied by great cheering, the balloon was cut from its moorings and set free to rise majestically into the noon sky. Six thousand feet into the air it went—the first public ascent of a balloon, the first step in the history of human flight. It came to earth several miles away in a field, where it was promptly attacked by pitchfork-waving peasants and torn *to pieces as an instrument of evil! 😊* ***Some p*eople just don’t like change!** Others want to mock or destroy what they don’t understand. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he brought radical change to the religious system. ***Some*** believed a change of government was taking place. **Many** who didn’t like change began to plot how they could destroy Jesus.

During this time, Gods people did not have a king, because the Romans were in authority. They could still appoint a high priest, but the Romans had to approve whoever they chose— and to ensure they would not lead a revolt they kept ceremonial robes locked up in the guard towers. Only to be used on Holy days. The day Jesus rode into Jerusalem both the pharisees and the Roman authorities would have been concerned as he drew a large crowd. But despite the crippling political power of the Romans, Gods people had not given up hope.

Gods prophets said the Messiah, the Saviour would come—that a king would someday ride into Jerusalem to bring change and deliver God’s people from the evil of the ungodly. **Zechariah 9:8-9 says** “I will guard my Temple and protect it from invading armies. … Rejoice greatly, 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—even on a donkey's colt. I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem.”

***Isaiah reinforced these words:*** “The LORD has sworn to Jerusalem by his own strength: I will never again hand you over to your enemies. Never again will foreign warriors come and take away your grain and wine. Within the courtyards of the temple, you yourselves will drink the wine that you have pressed. … Tell the people of Israel, “Look, your Saviour is coming. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes."

## Can you imagine what it was like the day King Jesus rode into town?

They were excited as they believed it would happen on Passover—that the Messiah would come and judge the ungodly. There would have been hundreds of thousands of Jews, from everywhere, in Jerusalem. The streets were filled for the parade. The people knew he was the prophet from Nazareth. Imagine the scene all the people were waving and shouting as Jesus rides on a small donkey colt just like the prophet Zechariah said.

**Jesus isn’t coming like the arrogant Roman generals on their war horses. He's coming in humility.**

Gods people were overwhelmed with joy. So they laid their coats down on the road like a red carpet and waved their palm branches, crying loudly Hosanna! Hosanna!

Singing their ancient Passover song: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" The crowd can't wait because they believe, *The Messiah will judge the ungodly AND remove those pagan Romans from power.*

But, much to their surprise, *Jesus doesn’t* go to the Roman fortress. He goes to the temple: Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

There was also a currency exchange in the temple, because Gods people couldn't use Roman or Greek coins, because they had pagan images on them. They could pay their fees for the high priest and offer the animal sacrifices according to the law of Moses. If they had travelled a long way to come for Passover, they often couldn’t bring their animal with them. So, they paid money and bought the animal for their offering when they got there. Prices were of course *a little high*, but it was convenient, and they could get a nice pair of birds or whatever was needed.

Originally the money changers and those who sold animals for sacrifice used to be outside the temple. But when Caiaphas became high priest, he allowed them all to move into the temple courtyard. It was like a menagerie. Clearly greed was at the top of the list, not God. The religious leaders clearly felt it was the most important business in the city.

**The King, the Messiah *did* come at Passover to judge the ungodly.** But to their shock, he *confronted them*, and not the Romans. We need to ask the question, who's violating the Holy Place more— the Roman soldiers who stand in a tower with the high priest's garments locked inside, or the temple bankers who are ripping money off of every person who comes to pray? It was worse for those who have no money. They were keeping the poorest people from worshiping. It's like the prophet Amos describes: "Why do you people long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. God despises the religious feasts; He cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring God burnt offerings and grain offerings, He will not accept them. … But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" You're interested in religion, ***but God is interested in people.***

## (Cleansing today’s temple)

Imagine the Messiah riding into Cootamundra, you just never know where he might go or what he might do. Just like the Jewish people we may think he's got to be *for us and against “all those evil people*.” But the reality is, he's out to destroy ***anything that separates people from God***. He's out to remove any evil—especially if it is in the form of empty religion.

**When the Messiah rides into town, even in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic**, He wants the *daily* worship of a changed life. He wants the daily worship of us lifting up others around us, praying for our church and our town to come to faith in Jesus. Today, the temple, the place where God's presence is, ***is in his people***, the church, even when it’s in our homes.

**What would Jesus cleanse today?** We might be thinking, maybe, the tele-evangelists! Jesus would go after them because their ministries have provided them with a $10 million, 80-acre, property. He would go after the ministry leader who bought a $5 million ocean-front estate on the North Shore. Of course, he may, but that’s too easy, because none of ***us*** are televangelists. ***The whole point is that Jesus would go after things in all of us that need cleansing.*** So, what are those things?

Do we love our liturgy and tradition, or our modern music more than Jesus? More than people? These times of isolation are a real challenge to those who miss the modern music or the ritual. At our church we have made changes in worship styles over the years. Some years ago, Rev David Ruthven started a more contemporary style of service. Some adapted to it to support changes so that new people could join our church. Church does not have to be traditional prayers and robes. We are fortunate to have both styles here. Its not one or the other. It has made the job of growing the church easier in Cootamundra. The culture of those who don’t yet know Jesus, is so different to our traditional service culture. At the moment, we are having to cope with not occupying the same building at the same time. we are having to adapt to reading emails, printed sermons and prayers and now to watching videoed messages.

***Will we turn inward and focus on lamenting what we have lost? ,*** or will we stay open and flexible so that we can become a church that is still worshipping the same God, still connecting with both young and old to see His church continue to grow in Cootamundra?

## Conclusion

In one Peanuts comic strip Sally was struggling with her memory verse for Sunday. She was absorbed in her thoughts trying to figure it out when she remembered, “Maybe it was something from the book of Reevaluation.” She never did find the memory verse, but we should always read the Bible with the intent of reevaluating our attitudes and actions to make sure they are in line with the truth of God’s Word.

When Jesus comes to town, you just never know where he might go or what he might do. He might challenge the things that are most dear to us—the things that are keeping us or others away from God. Let’s allow Gods word, in the power of His spirit, prepare us for when Jesus comes.