

Reflection Notes – 9/4/17

- Geoff Stevenson

Who/What Will You Sing For???

The very first game of football (the round ball code – soccer) I watched after joining the Western Sydney Wanderers as a member 5 years ago won me over. At one end of the field was a large group of people colourfully displaying the red, black and white of Wanderers. They began to sing and dance as the game began and they didn't stop until the final whistle – well, they did have a break at half time. They sang, danced, clapped and cheered through the whole game. There was no doubt who they were gathered for and what they had been preparing for. This was their team, representing their lives and the people of Western Sydney. It was fabulous and lifted the crowd, the team and brought a brilliant atmosphere to the whole event.

At one point they looked out at one side of the ground, at one of the grandstands. They pointed to us and yelled: 'Who do you sing for?' I didn't quite know what was happening but soon caught on as others around me pointed back and yelled: 'We sing for Wanderers!' This happened four times before they jumped up and down clapping and dancing. They then pointed to the other grandstand and did the same thing. After that they pointed to everyone and the whole place erupted in singing for the Wanderers – except for the visiting fans of the other team.

I thought about this question, 'Who do you sing for?' as I read the reading for this Sunday, Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-11). It is the day we read about Jesus entering into the city of Jerusalem for the Passover festival and ultimately where and when he will be crucified a few days later. The story only tells of Jesus' side of things. It only tells of how he entered the Holy City on a donkey, innocent, vulnerable but hailed by the crowds as king or Messiah – the Promised One. As the story portrays things he is the least likely looking Messiah or King. Humble on a donkey of all things. There is no army, weapons and the only pomp is the people laying down cloaks and waving branches and singing out to him. Their cries were 'Hosanna', which might infer something like 'Save us!' It was a deeper cry than 'We sing for Wanderers' but had the same intent of naming who they aligned themselves with. For this people: who was their king, their hope, the one they would trust their lives with?

What is missing in the story is the part that everyone of the time already knew, that which didn't need to be said then but is necessary now. The part of the story we miss because we are so far removed from this ancient culture is that Pontius Pilate, the Governor of the region under Rome would also enter the city that week. Passover Week was one filled with religious fervour and foment. It was a celebration of the ancient and formative story of their people when Moses led their ancestors out of Egypt, out of the oppression from the Egyptian Pharaoh over their people. The Jewish people of Jesus' day longed for liberation from the Roman occupation in the same way as their ancestors longed for liberation from Egypt. Zealots and fanatics rose up and caused unrest and uprisings during this religious festival as their hopes and dreams and passions took over and their lack of freedom fuelled anger and violence against Rome. In the midst of this religious festival, Pilate was expected to bring the rule of Rome, the power of Rome's

armies and he would quell violence and unrest, arrest trouble-makers and maintain some semblance of peace and order.

At some time during this festival, possibly at the same time as Jesus was riding into the city, Pilate would enter from the other direction. He would ride in on a war horse, a large stallion decked out in regal and military array. He would be accompanied by Rome's armies, soldiers on foot and horseback. The clatter of marching boots and horse hoofs on roads, of leather scraping leather and the clanging of metal filled the air. Trumpets and heralds would sound the cry out that Rome was here. There was pomp and ceremony all geared towards a show of power and might to conjure fear and warning into the heart of the people – of anyone who might just consider unrest! Rome's armies came with might and violence, weapons and force to maintain their peace – peace at the end of a sword.

So we have two parades entering Jerusalem. One of power, might, violence, fear and threat. The other a picture of vulnerability, humility and peace. One the might of Rome represented by Pontius Pilate, the Governor! The other a simple Galilean rabbi called Jesus who represented the Reign of God. He brought no armies, no weapons, nothing but love, vulnerable love. He came singing a new song where all had a place, an inclusive reign where all were welcomed for who they were. He came singing peace and justice, a song of equal distribution of resources across the earth – enough for all! He came singing a song that embraced all people and so threatened the rich, the powerful and those who controlled the world. The status quo of corrupt and abusive power who maintained their way through violent threat and murderous action were on the other side to Jesus and didn't like his song or his singing. They didn't want justice if it meant sacrifice on their part. They didn't want peace if it meant giving up some control or power. They didn't want equality if it meant being treated the same as everyone else. They didn't want Jesus!

Two men, two songs! Who will you sing for? Will you sing for Rome and the Emperor or for God's Reign represented by Jesus? Will you sing for this way of justice and peace or for the way of oppressive force and abusive, violent power? Will you sing for this one or that one? Who will you sing for?

The crowds caught the vision, the dream, the gentle revolution of love from the heart of God. Their hearts soared as they listened and believed and yearned. They were filled with hope and joy and they sang Jesus' song as he wandered slowly through their midst on a donkey, the symbol of peace and gentleness. Their king who was not a king pointed to God and this way of profound love, justice and peace. Who do you sing for?

As the week rolled on, the crowds rejoiced in their celebration and the forces of darkness, the powers of the world grew darker and more intense and intent on destroying the one in their midst who would dare disturb their 'peace' and their way of power and control. They rallied the troops and conspired. They planned and acted against this one who would send them up, disturb their peace and speak a truth against them that felt like slander and lies and rubbish that would ruin everything they had worked for, striven for and held dear. This troublemaker had to go and that is the story of Easter – except that love can be hurt, wounded but never destroyed. Love will always rise up from the ashes and live again. Love will find a way because it is born from the heart of God.

So who do we sing for? Do we sing for the ways of the world in their violence or greed or displays of power? Or will we sing for love and the way of peace in God?