

Luke 19.28-40 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” ^[a]

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰ “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Psalm 118.1-2 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. ² Let Israel say: “His love endures forever.”

Verses 19 – 29 Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

²³ the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success! ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you. ^[a] ²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up ^[b] to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Luke 22.14 – 23 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. ^[a] ²¹ But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. ²² The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!” ²³ They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

Verse 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.”

Peter’s denial is a brutal moment of recorded history. It is hugely unflattering. Jesus’s best mate promises he will be faithful to the grave, and then he goes back on his word and denies him — three times in a row. If the early church wanted to make out that its leading men

(besides Jesus) were brilliant, courageous, just men — then the unanimity of the gospels that Peter denied Jesus was an odd move.

But the gospels are not interested in flattering portraiture. They are interested in the truth. And the truth is that Jesus's best friend, in a trivial moment of questioning by a few people gathered around a fire found it easier to deny his association than to say: 'yes I am his friend, and I believe in him.'

But as you know, he recognised what he had done immediately the cock crowed. And as you know, Jesus reinstated him as the leader of church after his resurrection.

Peter's sudden uncharacteristic denial is the whole of Holy week in miniature. In two long readings we have been taken from the triumphal entry to the denial, to the flogging, to the bargaining, to the crucifixion, to the death, to the burial. We have seen the joyful celebrations of a city as Jesus enters, and a few days later their contempt as they ask for Barabbas to be spared instead of him. This is our human frailty, our sinfulness played out. Our inconstancy. Our Selfishness, our carelessness for the life of another, and our carelessness for justice for others.

The gospels are brutally truthful because the truth is that we are all fallible. And because Jesus is not. Jesus predicts Peter's betrayal and the scattering of his followers. He knows he is going to the cross and refuses to complain, nor to beg for justice, nor to curse or condemn. His resurrection, which he knows is coming, will be his absolute vindication.

The gospels' brutal truthfulness helps us to see who Jesus really was and is.

It is this visible contrast between Jesus and Peter that marks the gulf between God and humanity.

It is this contrast between the triumphal entry and the jeering of onlookers around the cross that marks the fickleness of humanity.

It is the contrast between Jesus's grace — seen especially through the events of Holy Week and Easter — and our tendency towards revenge or resentment that marks the moral gulf between our God and ourselves.

I encourage you to reflect, as I will, on these contrasts, through the coming week.

Amen.