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I wonder what causes you to make a joyful noise, to clap and cheer and praise. It could be when a family member receives an award, or performs in a show. It might be at a football or rugby match. It might be at a celebration like a birthday or anniversary - there are many reasons why we might lift our voices in a joyful way. Of course it may very well be here, in church!

There were some moments this week when I witnessed people, making a joyful noise. One was on Monday, after the ladies from our local Afghan families had finished serving the food they had cooked for Ashchurch Primary. A round of applause broke out in thanks and celebration, showing appreciation for what these ladies had done. It was a joy to be part of this. And the food was really good!

Another came at Wednesday's Installation of the first female Archbishop of

Canterbury, Sarah Mulally. Amongst all the pomp and ceremony, The African Choir of Norfolk joyfully sang and danced their way through the Cathedral as the procession - before the gospel was read out. They were bright, colourful and, I have to say, stood in stark contrast to all the formality around them. I found my spirit lifted and if I was there, would have found it hard not to clap and cheer for them.

Heralding the gospel reading in this way, reminded me of the joyful way the people welcomed Jesus into the city of Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. Singing and shouting for joy from Psalm 118

“Hosanna[b] to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”[c]

“Hosanna[d] in the highest heaven!”

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Pure joy and hope as Jesus comes trotting in on a donkey.

And don't we just need some joy and hope at the moment. Something to cheer & celebrate! Amidst all the dark and dangerous stories that fill our news, we need something to lift our spirits.

The triumphal entry of Jesus on Palm Sunday stands as an antidote to the peddler's of doom and gloom. In Luke's version of this story, the religious leaders, ask Jesus to tell his followers off, for saying the things they are saying, but Jesus replies "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!" You just can't push the joy out, it will find a way to make it's voice known, even if it is through the rocks and stones.

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And this was such a joyous spectacle that we read 'the whole city was stirred' and people asked 'who is this'?

In one translation of the Bible it says 'When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil'...

This event was so momentous that people were shaken and stirred as to what was going on and to who could cause such a state of affairs. It sounds like it was pretty chaotic. Not an orderly march through the city, but a raucous, riotous procession. Perhaps more like a carnival, than a peaceful, orderly parade.

It makes me wonder if we have tamed Jesus a little too much - we would rather see a calm and measured Christ than a messy Messiah, who laughed and joked and enjoyed a party! We have made Jesus far too much into a rule maker, sanitising his humanity and stripping out his

exuberant joy. What is it that Jesus said, "I have come to bring life, in all its fullness". This is full bodied life and joy here in the celebration of Jesus as the long awaited King, coming to rescue his people. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"[c]
"Hosanna[d] in the highest heaven!"

The coming of the King brings the coming of the Kingdom - a Kingdom of justice & Joy, as the hymn goes. And the Kingdom is something to be recognised as much out in the community as it is in the life of the church.

There is an approach that many people, who seek to follow Jesus advocate, 'Find out what God is doing, and join in.' In this Palm Sunday story, it would seem that God is bringing real joy and celebration and the people are joining in. Where can we do that in our communities? Where do we

see the love and joy of God being lived out in our neighbourhoods that we can join in with. Perhaps it's something like this from another moment of joy from this week. A lady called Vicki Hawker received a Certificate of Appreciation from Northway Parish Council, for all the community work that she does, not least, organising with others, delivering meals on Christmas Eve & Christmas Day, for families and individuals who would perhaps otherwise be on their own or unable to cook for themselves. It was lovely to see her get the recognition.

Our communities are full of people who bring big or little joys into people's lives everyday. I know people here in our church are doing it, I won't embarrass you by naming you.

I wonder if re-framing what WE do in the community as 'seeing what God is doing

and joining in' will help our faith feel more integrated into the whole of our lives. Not just seeing ourselves as community volunteers, but as disciples of Jesus, looking for signs of his Kingdom in our neighbourhoods and helping them to grow and flourish. We continue to do the same things, but with a different view point. And if we do this with a sense of real joy in Christ Jesus people will begin to notice. If we display more of that confident delight in Christ, I am sure people will begin to ask 'who is this' like they did of Jesus on Palm Sunday.

And real joy isn't always being upbeat and happy, we all have moments where the mood is much more like Good Friday than Palm Sunday or Easter Day - but as I heard Rowan Williams (the former Archbishop of Canterbury) say recently - joy rumbles beneath.

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So as we move through this Holy Week remembering all that Jesus went through, I hope you can carry some of this joy with you. You can still get angry, turning over the tables of injustice - you can still stoop down to serve another - you can still weep with Jesus as he is abandoned by his friends - you can still cry out in anguish, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me - we can do all these things and also carry the joy of Palm Sunday with us into our homes and communities, looking out for the signs of the presence of God, saying as both the Psalmist and Matthew say "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"[c]

Amen