

## Palm Sunday 10th April 2022

I wonder if any of you have watched the animated film 'Ice Age' and / or its sequels? Are you brave enough to own up to that? I am. And besides that, I particularly like the opening scenes where a crazy sabre-toothed squirrel called Scrat is trying to save an acorn, usually by trying to bury it, with the result that he starts an earthquake or splits a glacier.

Focus on the acorn and time-travel through a few millennia, and this acorn falls on a certain bird's head.

Does anyone know who this bird is?

Chicken Little, of course! He promptly starts charging around screaming that 'the sky is

falling - the sky is falling!' The hysteria races around the farmyard

The sky is falling! We must alert the king!" Henny-Penny squealed. "Oh, we must, we must!" Rooster-Booster chimed in. Again, Ducky-Chucky, now hot as ever and missing his pond, wondered how the sky could fall on a warm summer's day such as this one.

The moral of the traditional Chicken Little story is to have courage, even when it feels like the sky is falling.

It has also been described as 'a groundless or absurd conviction that some catastrophic consequence is imminent or underway. Some economists will try to convince you that the

sky is falling, when in reality this downturn is just a normal market adjustment.'

But just now, market economists aside, we might be forgiven for thinking in cataclysmic ways - even apocalyptic ways. I know some of you have voiced to me that you wonder - with what is happening in Ukraine - if we aren't seeing the beginning of the end, especially if the conflict escalates into a nuclear war.

At our ecumenical ministerial meeting on Wednesday this week, we (as a group of pastors) discussed the concerns that some of our parishioners had over recent world events. Nevertheless, it must have seemed very

similar to those living through World War One or Two, and my experiences in various war zones has taught me that for the recipient of violence, it **always** seems as though the world is about to end; because in a way it does for that person.

On a trip I made to Nigeria many years ago, where a certain small town in the north called Wusasa was trying to recruit me as a doctor for their hospital, I heard stories about the new 'cathedral' that they were trying to build. I went to see it, and the walls were only part built, and there was no roof. I was like something straight out of the bible - only mud and straw to make the bricks. I wondered what happened in the rainy season.

Each night, after the workmen had gone home, the local muslims came and tore down whatever progress the Christians had made the previous day. As you can imagine, progress was slow.

Often not content with just destroying the repeated attempts to build a new cathedral, the muslims would go into the Christian villages during the day when they knew that the men would be trying to build the church again, and rape the women and often kill as well - particularly the young children.

I had seen similar scenes in Bosnia, but where I was, in the mountains, it was the Roman Catholic priest who was handing out guns for

the locals to go and kill their muslim neighbours.

For any extreme of violence, it will always seem as though the sky is falling.

That is why this scene that we see played out this Palm Sunday is so bitter-sweet; it is a drama with the deceptive promise of acceptance, which so rapidly turns dark in less than a week. It is ironically underlined by the arrival of Jesus on a donkey. If he was a king going off to war, he would be riding a horse - but he is riding a donkey, which indicates that he is coming in peace.

How hollow those cries of 'Hosanna!' must have sounded in his ears - knowing they would mutate into the ugly baying of 'Crucify!' only a few days later.

Palms were symbols of victory and triumph, and so the whole moment is one of a rather pathetic charade, aping the entry of a triumphant Roman general returning from his successful campaign.

Far from returning from his battles, Jesus was riding towards his final battle, still with the foe to defeat - and knowing only too well what it would cost him.

Some liturgies, in their eucharistic prayers, say that Jesus' death was one he 'accepted

freely,' I'm afraid I cannot accept that; his death did not cost nothing - it cost him everything. That is why I change those words in the eucharistic prayer that we use - you may not have noticed, but I say the words, 'a death he willingly accepted.'

But I digress into semantics, and I apologise for that.

I would rather go back to Scrat, the sabretoothed squirrel and his acorn.

When Scrat finally buries his acorn, we do not see a beautiful oak tree arise, but a seismic event that splits the Ice Age world; in the same way, the seemingly insignificant event of

a man riding a donkey into Jerusalem one day, sets off a chain reaction that not only ended with apocalyptic scenes - in Matthew's account of the crucifixion - 'At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life' - but started a movement that is still in evolution, still growing, still going forward - and in a very real sense, still splits the world.

Some people will try to tell you that God is dead or that Christianity is yesterday's story - but the more people I talk to - including young

people - the more I find that is simply not true.

There has been a lot of dross tossed in front of us, mentally, in the last decade or three, a lot of dirt and dust that obscures our vision. It has been made up of politicizing the world , glorifying power-mongering, and secularization. I think it has been a reaction to the 60's and 70's flower power generation, who wanted no responsibility for anything, so that cleared the way for those greedy for power and influence to come in and be dictators.

I think we have the opportunity now to use our palms, figuratively and mentally, to sweep the

dust, dirt, and dross from the road in front of Jesus' and clear his way to the Cross. The prevent it would be to play into the hand of the devil.

That is why our Palm Sunday is so bitter-sweet - because we need Jesus to go to the Cross for us - even though we know it costs him everything in human terms.

We cannot live without it, and he cannot live on Easter Sunday without it either.