

We would all like to think that, come the hour, we would prove ourselves heroes. We would all like to think that we are brave, that we would be courageous in the face of indignity, we would defend our principles, stand up for what is right till we are knocked down, bend but not break at the onslaught of evil but the truth is, such courage is the exception rather than the rule. Our fine speeches, our good intentions, our noble promises, our heroic bluster: all turn to dust in our hands under the pressure of fear. We grasp at straws, fight for a seat on the lifeboat, abandon everything in our haste to flee. Truth be told, the vast majority of humanity would rather live on its knees than die standing, would rather slink away shamefaced to live another day.

Each year as we stand on Palm Sunday at the beginning of Holy Week, as we have started to make present again the events two millennia past, from the proud procession of palms to the contrite creeping to the Cross, Jesus presents us with a challenge and a choice.

Do we stand to walk with Christ the way of Calvary? Do we stand up to be counted among the outcast, the unwanted, the undesirables? Do we speak out for the poor, for the vulnerable, the oppressed, the lonely, the displaced? Do we risk our own status and popularity, our success and our wealth, our standing in society, our safety, our lives even to reach out a hand to catch our brothers and sisters who fall? Do we turn our backs on the quick buck, the easy fix, the blind eye, the easy life and turn towards the truth?

Or do we drop to our knees.

Do we kneel before the gods of this world? Kowtow to the bully boys and join in with the kicking they are giving to those who can't fight back? Prostrate ourselves to corruption, bend the knee to greed, suck up to selfishness, doff our cap to tribalism, lick the boots of nationalism, bow and scrape before wrong? Do we pretend we haven't heard the bigots' abuse, avert our eyes to the scapegoating of the poor, walk on the other side when the victim is hunted down and live to cringe another day?

It's not an easy choice Jesus asks us to make. It's a choice we will make in the face of cold, naked fear. But a choice it is. The Romans forced Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross, but Jesus does not, will not compel us to walk with him. We can choose to stay put, stay in the crowd, watch him pass by, maybe join in the heckles, the taunts, the laughter and scorn. Safety is in numbers, and we know where most of the

people of Jerusalem on that day will be found. Whatever we do, wherever we find ourselves standing by the end of this week- at the foot of the cross or safe in our homes with the doors locked and the curtains drawn- we will have chosen to be there.

Truly, the victory has already been won: Jesus, weakened, bloodied, mocked, abused, has already walked the way to Calvary, taken upon himself the hatred of humanity, taken it all and given back love; not only has he pleaded with the Father to forgive us, but he has harrowed hell, risen from the tomb and conquered death. Those facts are not in doubt. Holy week has already happened and will never be rerun. But the question Jesus asks you and me, today, at the start of this week still needs to be asked, as urgently as ever.

This is the question Jesus is asking us.

Will you follow me?