

Sermon Palm Sunday – 13 April 2025

By Revd. Karen Adendorff

Today, as you know, is Palm Sunday and it marks the beginning of Holy week. Our worship service includes two important observances: a Palm Procession that re-enacts the events of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the Reading of The Passion - that very long reading - that tells of Jesus' betrayal, pain and death. So, there is a lot going on in the readings and in our service. This can be a bit overwhelming, making it difficult to know what to focus on. On the one hand, we wave palm branches and welcome Jesus as our king and Messiah, as the crowds did in the Gospel reading. On the other hand, we are confronted with the events of the Passion that lead up to Jesus' crucifixion and death. Two sides of the same coin - the joy and celebration of the day as well as the trouble and danger that lies ahead. This welcoming procession is the beginning of a journey that leads not to a throne of earthly power, but to a cross of unimaginable suffering.

What stood out for me as I read through the readings in preparation for my sermon was the nature of Jesus' humility that came through in all our readings today. A humility that marks the very nature of Jesus' kingship. One that stands in stark contrast to the power structures of the world – of our society. A humility that challenges our own understanding of power and glory.

Our lives are filled with ups and downs. Joys and sorrows. Celebrations and despair. For all kinds of reasons – financial, sickness, abandonment, betrayal, grief and so on. We know and believe that in all circumstances we can trust God to be with us. To see us through. Yet sometimes our actions and lives tell a different story. We prefer to seek human intervention. We wish our lives and circumstances were better – you know those If only...then... conversations we have with ourselves and others. We want our government, political leaders, the church and our families to do things differently. To make things better. We want God to intervene in a tangible way and save us from what we are going through. This is what the Jews also wanted. They wanted a king who would save them from the Roman government who occupied their land, taxed them heavily and treated them unjustly. They believed Jesus was the King – the long-awaited Messiah – who would overthrow the Roman Government and make their lives better. Like us, they too, seemed to equate power with dominance, success with status, and glory with outward recognition.

But Jesus shows them, and us, a different way.

He enters Jerusalem on a colt – a symbol of gentleness, peace and humility. Rather than a war horse – a sign of military power and dominance. Showing that his kingship is not one of domination, but of service. His power is not made visible through force, but through love and sacrifice.

Our reading from Isaiah echoes this theme of humility. The servant of the Lord – often understood to symbolize or be the image of Christ - displays obedience in the face of suffering. Showing a willingness to be taught, to endure scorn and opposition, trusting in God's vindication. He says, "I offered my back to those who struck me...I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced...he who vindicates me is near" (Isaiah 50:6-8) This foreshadows the very treatment Jesus will endure in Jerusalem. His path to glory is paved not with triumph, but with humility and suffering.

Similarly, the Psalmist's cry of distress in Psalm 31 reflects a vulnerability, a humble dependence on God in the midst of suffering. "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away through sorrow, my soul and my body also" (v 1). We hear the cries of one who feels abandoned and threatened. Yet, despite this deep distress, God is his refuge: "But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'" The Psalmist's sentiments reflect the very human emotions that Jesus himself will experience in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. Reminding us that even when face humiliating circumstances, not of our own making, God is our refuge.

The reading of the Passion portrays a number of instances where Jesus' humility is made visible. At the Last Supper, he kneels to wash the feet of his disciples – an act of ultimate servanthood. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he wrestles with the weight of what lies ahead yet ultimately submits to the Father's will - "Not my will, but yours be done." Throughout the trials, the false accusations, the mockery, and the brutal crucifixion, Jesus embodies a quiet strength born of deep humility.

The picture we get from our readings is that this display of humility is not a once off thing – a single act. Rather, it is to be found at the very heart of Jesus' nature. Embodying who he is and not just how he acts or responds in some instances. Each one of us has and can display humility sometimes but very few of us can say that it is at the heart of our nature. I think that the Philippians reading, particularly verses 5-8 pulls our readings together. A summary, if like. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he

was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

And so, as we journey this week with Jesus to the cross and reflect on our readings, let us examine the places where pride hinders us from truly following him. Let us examine our own desires for recognition, equality and power. Let us ask God for the grace to embrace humility, to serve others with love, and to find our true glory not in earthly acclaim, but in faithful obedience to God's will.

The King who rode on a humble donkey. Who endured the scorn of others, and the humiliation of suffering. The one who did not take advantage of his equality with God but instead emptied himself. This King – Jesus - invites us to walk in his humble way. May we, like him, choose the path of service, of sacrifice. The path that ultimately leads not to earthly dominion, but to the eternal glory of God's kingdom.

Let us pray

Loving God, grant us grace to walk in Christ's way of humility and love, that we may share in his resurrection to new life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**