

The Glory and the Shame: The Heart of a Servant King:

Mark 11: Isaiah 50v6; Isaiah 53v4; Philippians 2v7.

It was a few days before the Jewish festival of Passover and Jesus was coming into Jerusalem. He was riding on a blazing white stallion and kicking up a cloud of dust as he rode through the majestic gates and looked up at the great Temple.

The disciples sounded his arrival with a fanfare piercing through the noise of the city, causing merchants to leave their stalls and children to squeal with delight.

He knew that his arrival would cause a commotion, not only with the occupying Romans but also with the priests who had begun to come out onto the streets too.

This his is exactly what he wanted, was looking for trouble.

The people that he passed on his way into the city were in awe of his regal stature, his long blond hair fell from under his golden crown across his face, and his armour shone brightly like diamonds in the eastern sun. All who saw him were awestruck by his arrival. As Jesus passed by, you could hear the people say, "Who is that man?"

A large crowd of people now gathered to see what the commotion was all about. The stallion stood on its hind legs, neighed loudly, and pawed the air with its front legs. Jesus lifted his sword into the air and announced that he was now king and defender of Israel the long for awaited Messiah, come to rid the nation of its oppressors.

Jesus turned as the Roman Governor appeared at the door of his palace quaking in fear, and as quickly as he had arrived, Jesus rode off into the sunset, his message delivered, and the peoples celebrated their soon to be found liberation by this warrior king with song and dancing!

Now the biblical scholars among you will at this point probably be scratching your heads and be saying 'this isn't the story I remember from last year's Palm Sunday readings!' And my friends you would be right!

Today's first words makes for a great story, and we might wish that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was as spectacular as all the above, it's certainly what the residents of Jerusalem that day had been wishing for, but that's not what happened, that's not what happened AT ALL!

Having said that if you do look carefully at the real story there's no denying that there is a little touch of glory in the entrance of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. Jesus was welcomed as a hero. Many of the people had heard about Jesus, his teaching about love and his miracles too.

The name of this extraordinary Rabbi from Nazareth would have been on many of their lips, spreading stories about how he had healed people who were incurably sick, how the blind were able to see, the deaf to hear, and how he restored people to their families after he had driven out evil spirits. As a Rabbi he would certainly have caused more than a little debate in the synagogues as news about his teachings became known and as shockingly his compassionate embrace of hated tax collectors and scorned prostitutes had been witnessed by so many.

In Saint Oswald's there has been a new frieze created by the children of the Little House on display this week (you can see it above the Altar during our morning service video for today) which wonderfully represents how the crowd was so excited that this miracle-working Rabbi was coming to town that day.

The people waved palm branches; they spread their coats on the road; and they shouted and sung, *Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.*"

The crowds welcomed him as they would an actual liberating king. In their minds this was the man who came in the name of the Lord to intervene in the wretched circumstances of their lives and to give them hope for the future free them of their oppression and bring peaceful prosperity at time when nothing, but despair and troubles filled their land and their homes.

No wonder they welcomed him in the way they did. In the eyes of the crowd there was no doubt that Jesus was the promised messianic king sent by God.

But this king was different, wasn't he? There was no white stallion. No obvious show of power and strength. No fanfare, instead, he rode a humble donkey.

And as Jesus rode along (*contrary to some representations from Hollywood*) Jesus didn't smile and laugh with joy with the disciples nor did he give royal waves to the people lining the street.

His heart was heavy. Saint Luke tells us that as Jesus got closer to the city, he wept. Jesus was weeping as he was being carried through the dusty noisy streets.

Jesus knew that his enemies had begun to plot how they could get rid of him. He knew that in a few days these same crowds would not be shouting their praises but calling out: *Crucify him! Crucify him!*

He wept because they wanted peace in their city but could not see in Jesus the source of true peace – the peace that comes from forgiveness and a restored relationship with his Father. The peace that only love can bring.

This then, is no ordinary king riding on a donkey, riding high on his royal pedigree assuming respect and service from his underlings. No, this king had come to serve. A servant-king. The king who on Good Friday would bear no royal crown but a ring of thorns and choose in a final act of compassion and grace to give up his life for those he loves, for those in Jerusalem that day, but also for me and you today too.

It is in this context that we are confronted with the words of Saint Paul to his Philippian friends. Paul, it seems, is speaking about Christ, who he is and what he has done for us. He shows us who Jesus is in the contrasting pictures of both servant and king: Listen to him...

"[Jesus] always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death— his death on the cross.

At the heart of Jesus' work was the humble, selfless desire to serve. "... *He gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant.... He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death ...*"

Our Palm Sunday king did not want to dominate, he wanted to serve, even if that meant giving up his own life.

If we could be in any doubt about this depth of his servant heart of love just think about what happened at the Last Supper.

No one was prepared to wash the dust off the disciples' feet before beginning the meal. So, Jesus, the master, the king of heaven, the one who cast the stars into space and created the cosmos, tied a towel around his waist, took a bowl of water, knelt before the disciples and began to wash the stench of the day from their feet!

In this very special intimate act he spelt out how God feels about us and showed us the way we are called to treat one another. Jesus didn't give a second thought to doing the lowliest and most demeaning of jobs in service of those he loved.

Today he reminds us all that heaven's love has no boundaries and is forever reaching into the ugliest, muckiest places of our lives and washes us clean, so clean that we can shine like the stars he created and come before the God of Justice, without fear but rather firm in the knowledge that we will be embraced by his reckless mercy and mysterious grace.

As a child when I was going to synagogue with my little brother every *Shabbat* I remember being struck by the way Jesus shone out from some of the scriptures we were reading at Hebrew school. For me the words of Jeremiah and Isaiah always moved my heart. Isaiah describes what we today in the church know as *The Suffering Servant*.

Isaiah is looking forward to the Saviour and describes the kind of person he will be. Surely just as they struck me they must have resounded in the ears of the disciples as they looked on to the journey Jesus was on as he pilgrimaged towards the cross.

"He endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne. ... Because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. ... He was treated harshly, but endured it humbly; he never said a word." (Isaiah 53)

There is no glory here – just a suffering servant. The creator treated cruelly at the hands of his own creation. Mocked, whipped, and nailed to a cross. He died a criminal. He allowed all of this to happen because of his love for you and me and because of his desire that the relationship between God and humanity be restored. Jesus' death as servant, met our greatest need – a reconnection with the God of love.

As we enter Holy Week, let us then, reflect on the way Jesus gave himself like a servant so completely for us.

As we enter Holy Week with hearts recommitted to our Lord, may we all take the time to reflect on what it means to be a servant of the servant king.

As we enter Holy Week and begin to look forward to the Joy of Easter, may we continue to choose as Jesus did, to live lives that rejoice in loving others and daily turn in faith and choose to live lives that are motivated by his love.

Yes, we may cry *Hosanna* today like those who were there that day when Jesus entered Jerusalem, but let us vow afresh to not be like them who so quickly turned away from him and forgot about his grace.

Let our cry of *Hosanna* be a moment of servant humility that goes on for more than just one day. May our *Hosanna* be a prayer that our hearts and the heart of heaven will beat as one again without reservation in love for each other.

And may we all take hope from the way that Jesus the king of heavens laid aside his glory and chose to be wrapped in our shame so that we his Easter people can be forever more be wrapped in his mercy, his love and his grace.

Amen.

I leave you with the words of a song that has been in my mind as I have been writing to you today. May it bless you and lead you pray fully through the days that lay ahead until we meet once again on Easter Morn. FrM

From heaven you came helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load he chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
'Yet not My will but Yours,' He said

Come see His hands and His feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered

So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone Him
Each other's needs to prefer
For it is Christ we're serving

This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King

*Come now and worship, worship Jesus,
Our Forever Loving Servant King. Amen.*