

## SERMON: A Different Kind of King (Matthew 21:1-11; 27:11-54)

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April 5, 2020

Our Gospel readings this morning have taken us from the highs of Palm Sunday, and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the lows of his trial and crucifixion. It is a journey in microcosm of the ups and down that the disciples themselves must have felt as they travelled these pivotal seven days in the life of Jesus.

It had all started so well. Jesus arrives in Jerusalem along with hundreds of thousands of other pilgrims, coming to celebrate Passover. Many had walked for over a hundred miles to get there, and now anticipation and excitement would have been close to fever-pitch. Above them, on the plateau was Jerusalem, their destination. They were here for their most special festival of the year in the most special place. Imagine football fans arriving at Wembley, walking up Wembley way for an FA Cup final having travelled with their team through all the other rounds and you get an inkling into the excitement of this crowd.

But there was particular excitement on this day.

For amongst them is the one they hope will be their king, their liberator, the one who "will make their country great once again". The signs are good. His miracles - especially of raising Lazarus from the dead - help to confirm that "surely this is the one".

And so they spread their cloaks on the ground, a red carpet for a king. And they wave palm branches in the air - an act last done 200 years earlier when a freedom fighter, Judas Maccabeaus, had entered Jerusalem to lead a violent uprising that overthrew the foreign power of the time and established a short period of Israelite independence. And they sing of David - Israel's greatest king - and their hopes that the glory days will return.

But over the next few days Jesus will show himself to be a very different kind of king. Even on this day, with the adulation of the crowd, he rides on a donkey, not on a white stallion or a golden chariot. It's the modern-day equivalent of a Robin Reliant rather than a limousine. Here is a different kind of king.

He eschews the big political rallies or attempts to woo the rich and powerful, and instead spends time with the poor and marginalised, and has a simple meal with his friends. He washes his disciples' feet - the act of a humble slave - rather than boast of his authority and lord it over them. He rejects the path of violence in the Garden of Gethsemane, choosing to heal when some of his followers look to fight. In his trial, he does not demand his rights or rail against the injustices of it all or pull rank as the one who has been entrusted by the Father to judge the whole world, but instead stands silent and calm. And on the cross, far from hurling insults and curses on his enemies, or calling down a legion of angels to his rescue, he looks out for the needs of those he loves, and he prays forgiveness for all his enemies.

The crowds were right to proclaim Jesus as king. But he is a different kind of king. Not a king of power and might. Not a king promising to restore a nation or a people to a time of former glory. But a King of love.

A king who will go to whatever lengths, a king who will do whatever it takes, to bring us forgiveness, healing, hope, life. To bring good out of calamity; light out of darkness; hope out of despair. To show us love.

We are in need of such love, more than ever, at this time. To know that as we face such immense challenges, maybe as individuals but also as communities and as a nation at this time, God's love for us, and our love for him and for one

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another, is what gives life meaning and hope.

The story of Holy Week and Easter is profoundly the story of love, of love that overcomes, of love that heals and brings hope. As we reflect, experience and celebrate over these coming days, may we come to know his love more deeply, and give him love in return.

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