

## SERMON PREACHED AT SJH PALM SUNDAY YEAR C 14 APRIL 2019

It's difficult to know what to do with the sermon on Palm Sunday. It could be delivered in the vicarage drive, but it's difficult to be heard outside and quite a few people are actually in church waiting for the procession to arrive. As for preaching after the long passion narrative – well, any words at that stage seem totally inadequate and inappropriate. So I'll offer a few thoughts at this point.

A theme running through the gospels is, 'Who is Jesus?' When he works miracles people wonder where his power comes from. Halfway through his ministry he asks his disciples who people are saying he is. Now, as he approaches the end of his life, his identity becomes clearer. Drawing near to Jerusalem on a colt is a claim to kingship. There is Old Testament background to this. From the prophet Zechariah,

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass. (9.9.)

Zechariah also mentions the Mount of Olives (14.4), which is where our gospel reading begins.

There is another link to the Old Testament. When king David died, there was a dispute over which of his sons should succeed him – it didn't necessarily go to the eldest. The dispute was settled when Solomon rode his father's mule into Jerusalem, entering on the same side as the Mount of Olives. Solomon was anointed and crowned. (1 Kings 1.)

So Jesus' action is a claim to kingship. The crowd declares, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." The humble mode of transport suggests it's not about earthly power and status. And indeed the earthly powers in Jerusalem do not accept his kingship. In fact they use it as an accusation before Pilate: Christ the king is a threat to Caesar. In Luke's gospel, from which we read, as Jesus comes within sight of Jerusalem, he weeps over the city. He foretells its destruction because it did not know the time of its visitation: it did not recognise who he was when he came.

A natural question is, 'Do we recognise Jesus as our king?' Is he the person we are trying to serve in all that we do and in all our other relationships? It is through our love for others, and especially the vulnerable – the 'little ones' – that our devotion to Jesus is expressed. We offer honour to earthly monarchs, but to Jesus worship is due. Holy Week begins today, and with it the most profound liturgies of the church's year, full of symbol and action. Participating in worship is one

way we draw closer to our Lord. We share his suffering and we share his triumph: the king reigning from the cross and rising from the dead. This expressed well in a hymn we sometimes sing. It's 'Forth in the peace of Christ we go,' in both of our hymnbooks (number 361 in the green books we're using today). I'll finish with this quotation.

King of our hearts, Christ makes us kings; Kingship with him his servants gain;  
With Christ, the Servant-Lord of all, Christ's world we serve to share Christ's reign.