**Sermon: perfection in humility**

So what are we supposed to be thinking about on Palm Sunday? On one level, we are simply retelling the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem – finally, people seem to have woken up to who Jesus really is and they welcome Him as a king, a new David - shouting Hosanna! and waving palm leaves as they had in the past to mark the return of great warrior kings. On another level, however, we can hear this story in the context of the gospels as a whole – Jesus solemnly approaching Jerusalem, the place where, within a week, He will be condemned and crucified. There is the clear presence of danger, a sense of foreboding, an atmosphere of sadness. And yet, we also know what follows, how sadness turns to joy, and how the real nature of Jesus’ Kingship is finally fully revealed in the crucifixion and resurrection.

As some commentators have put it, we can read the gospels as we might a good detective novel – either reading each page as it comes, sticking with the moment and being attentive to all the twists and turns. Or we can turn to the back pages first and then read it, knowing how it ends, and seeing the whole story in the light of this knowledge. Yet, however we read the Palm Sunday narrative, there seems to be a common theme that runs throughout - and that is the example of humility, the example of putting others first and of diminishing the self.

In the first instance, there is an example of humility among the crowd in that Jews of all backgrounds seem to have come together to recognise the kingship of Jesus, putting aside, at least for a moment, issues of status and standing. And then we have the manner of Jesus’ entry, choosing not the warhorse of a warrior King, but instead, a humble donkey, a clear reference to Zechariah’s prophecy that the King comes to them lowly and seated on a donkey’s colt.

However, there is arguably something in this section that jars and jolts as Jesus seems to be encouraging the reaction of the crowd –giving them a clear sign that their king is coming and not discouraging the adulation that follows – is this really an act of humility?

Well, genuine humility doesn’t deny one’s true being – this would be false humility, the type that sees us seeking plaudits for being humble – something that is thought out and aimed at promoting self, rather than lived out and aimed at serving others. Jesus was simply being who he had to be – he was the Messiah, he was the one who the people ought to be welcoming. His arrival was not arrogance, but rather another sign to encourage people to turn away from the way of pride and self and instead follow Jesus’ way of humility and service.

And Jesus continues with this way of humility - even at those times when taking a different path might have taken away suffering and brought power and influence. On several occasions, Jesus has the opportunity to perform in front of the Roman and Jewish authorities – to show them the fullness of His divinity – but he doesn’t. He could have raised more than just Lazarus from the dead, he could have repeated his performance at the transfiguration, he could have commanded the elements to reveal his power, but he doesn’t. Instead, he models the way of wholeness and flourishing that is available to each one of us - a servant life, one with love at the centre, showing this to be greater than anything, even death itself.

Such humility is the mark of His Kingship. As St Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians, Jesus “…being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.  And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!”

This example of humility is not just inspirational, it is also something that stands at the heart of our health and well-being as human beings. In living out the role of the servant, putting others first and denying pride, we align ourselves with Christ and become what we are made to be. Amen