



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Our Humble King Philippians 2:5-11 & St. Matthew 21:1-17

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Our Epistle this morning begins with this exhortation to us:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5)

Again, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” That wasn’t supposed to be a hard thing to have, but the story of Adam teaches us that humanity has rejected it. God created each of us as bearers of his image and likeness, but we have all defaced his image and likeness in us with sin. We set our minds against God and against the things of God; we set our minds on our own ambition and our own satisfaction. And so Jesus came—as a second Adam—to save us from our sins. But Jesus didn’t just come to plaster and whitewash over our unrighteousness. He came to restore the image of God in each of us—to change us from the inside out that we might actually be holy. And that’s where St. Paul’s going here: If you’ve put your faith in the sacrifice of Jesus at the cross—that’s what we looked at last Sunday—then the Spirit has united you with Christ and made you part of his Body. Jesus is the head of that Body—so let his mind be yours. But then we have to ask: “What is the mind of Christ?”. And so Paul goes on:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:5-11)

St. Paul tells us that Jesus was characterised by *humility*. Think about

what who he was and what he did. He was God. He was the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the divine Word, begotten of his Father from all eternity. As the Word, he was the instrument of Creation. He is Lord of the world—and yet he was willing to “empty himself,” as the King James puts it. When we, his creatures, fell into sin and were separated from him, he humbled himself and became one of us in order to restore us to life and to restore us to himself. That doesn’t mean he ceased to be God or gave up even the tiniest bit of his divinity. It means that as God he took up our human nature and bound it to himself and in doing so he bound himself—his divinity—to us. Imagine the humility involved in eternal God choosing to bind himself to humanity—to the lowly thing he created. And yet it wasn’t enough for him to simply become a man. He could have come as a great king, as another Solomon—but he didn’t. He humbled himself to the lowest of the low—born of a woman pregnant before she was married, poor herself and from a poor town, rejected by other men even from his birth—because of that rejection, being born in a smelly and dirty stable. In his thirty years, he never rose much above those humble beginnings in the stable. He was rejected and despised by his own people. Paul goes on:

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

God humbled himself and became the servant of his creatures, even to the point of dying for them—and not just dying a natural death, but dying a painful, brutal, and humiliating death on the cross, a death that was reserved for criminals and the lowest of the low. Born in the worst part of the wrong part of town to a poor and teenage mother, growing up a poor carpenter’s son, and ultimately dying a criminals death in disgrace. That’s what St. Paul means when he says that Christ “emptied himself” and “made himself nothing”. And yet it was for a purpose.

St. John tells us in his Gospel:

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:9-12)

The good news is that Jesus didn’t humble himself for nought. There were many people—and still are many people—who received him and who have let him make a triumphal entry into their hearts and lives with his gifts of redemption and sonship.

But today, in the Gospel, we see him making his entry into Jerusalem—going there in humility as our servant, offering himself as a sacrifice for our sins. That Thursday night he had spent in Jericho in Zacchaeus’ house. On Friday he continued on toward Jerusalem for the Passover. The roads were crowded, because everyone in the nation was making that same journey—all the roads leading to Jerusalem would have been packed with pilgrims. But he didn’t go all the way there on Friday. Jews didn’t travel on the Sabbath—on Saturday—so he stopped to spend the night in Bethany—just a few kilometres from the city. He stayed with his friends—with Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

We can only imagine the number of people who came to Bethany while Jesus was there on that Sabbath. The roads were crowded and the stories of Jesus having raised Lazarus from the dead would undoubtedly have been passed along among all those pilgrims. Here was their chance, not only to see Lazarus—the man who was raised after three days in the grave—but to see Jesus too, the man who had raised him. A lot of these people would naturally have been doubters, but here was their chance to see the evidence and they went away from Bethany believers. And that made the Jewish leaders all the more furious.

On Sunday morning the crowd in Bethany was bigger than ever. I can just see Jesus stepping out of Simon the Lepers’ house, where he spent the night, and there was this huge crowd of people

cheering—the King, the Messiah had come and was going to march into Jerusalem and take his throne. Who would want to miss that! Word had spread to Jerusalem and another crowd was making its way down the road from the opposite direction too. As Jesus was coming to the little town of Bethpage on the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ahead to get a donkey and a colt that he told them they'd find tied there. It was more evidence of his divinity—he knew without seeing. And sure enough, the disciples did what he told them to do and came back with the donkey and the colt. No doubt they wondered what this was all about, and there were people in the crowd thinking, “If this is the King, the Messiah, he sure looks poor. Why is he riding on a donkey? Shouldn't the great King be coming on a great war horse and with an army?” At the time the disciples didn't understand either, but later they remembered Zechariah's prophecy:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

The promised King was to ride into Jerusalem, not with a great show of earthly power, but in humility—riding on a humble donkey.

As the crowd from Bethany got closer, they met the crowd coming from Jerusalem, and true to the prophecy, the daughters of Zion rejoiced and shouted aloud. The crowds surrounded Jesus shouting:

Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! (Matthew 21:9)

Those were the words of Psalm 118. They were part of the Hallel that the priests sang or chanted as they received the Passover procession. These were also the same words that families would sing during the Passover meals they had in their homes. We still sing these

words as we come to the Table in the Lord's Supper. They sang, Hosanna! “Give us your salvation! Save us now!” They were shouting: “Hail the King of Israel! Here comes the one bearing God's gifts and endowments for his people! Here comes the one who has raised Lazarus from the dead and will raise us from the dead too! Here comes the promised Messiah!”

As the procession moved along, the people took branches from the palm trees along the road and spread them in Jesus' way, and St. Matthew says, “Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road.” Think about that. These were people who were a long way from home. Most of them were probably travelling light—they didn't have an overabundance of clothing with them—many of them probably had no change of clothes. But they carpeted the road with their own clothes in honour of the King. Shouting Hosanna cost them nothing, neither did the palm branches they pulled off the trees, but the clothes on the road showed a sacrifice on the part of these people. They wanted to honour the Lord Jesus. And it was a great day for Jesus—one of the few times, in fact, that he accepted homage as the King.

St. John tells us that the crowd was there mainly because they had heard about Lazarus. There were, no doubt, people in the crowd who had been there when Jesus had called Lazarus out of his tomb. And there were probably many who had seen Lazarus since—alive again. They were there as witnesses to Jesus' divinity. And now as they made their way into Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. Imagine a crowd coming into Courtenay, coming up the highway with this one man at the head of the parade and everyone cheering him. We'd be asking, “Who is this?” and that's exactly what the people of Jerusalem were asking: “Who is this? What's this all about?” And Matthew says the crowd with Jesus told the people: “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee” (Matthew 21:10-11).

That probably left a lot of people scratching their heads. All this for a poor man, riding on a donkey—and from Nazareth, of all places? He doesn't look like a king! But the Pharisees knew exactly who Jesus claimed to be and this sent them into a frenzy. Jesus coming into the city, acclaimed by the crowds as if he were a king—that was a direct challenge to their authority. They were afraid of Jesus. Everything they had done to stop him had failed up to this point. They already had an order out that he should be arrested wherever he was found and now here he comes, riding openly into the city and acclaimed by a huge crowd. They were helpless and in their anger they said, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the *world* has gone after him” (John 12:19). No doubt it seemed to them like the entire world was carried away in this flood of enthusiasm for Jesus. They were the only ones—they thought—who still had their feet on the ground.

And it's the hate of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders that makes the Palm Sunday Gospel so dramatic. Jesus knew these men wanted him dead, but he went to Jerusalem anyway. He was on a mission of love and not even their bloody hate would stop him. But brothers and sisters, what does this mean for us? We sing our Hosannas to Jesus. We proclaim: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” We sing praises just like those people did almost 2000 years ago. The problem then was that those people missed what Jesus was *really* about. They thought he came to establish an earthly kingdom. They expected to share in his earthly triumph. When they figured out that his destination was not the throne on Mount Zion, but was actually the cross on Mount Calvary all their praises evaporated. Jesus knew this is what would happen. That's why he would stand looking over the city and weep: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Matthew 23:37). He came to his own. They received him at

first, but when he didn't meet their expectations, his own did not receive him—they were looking for peace, but they were blinded by their misconceptions and false expectations of what the Messiah would do and who he would be. The couldn't wrap their heads around a humble Messiah.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus comes today. Just as it was then, his purpose is to bring salvation and holiness, to rescue us from sin, and to bring us into his kingdom—into his Body, his Church. And in his Church there are still a lot of people who sing “Hosanna!” on Sunday and then run from the Garden on Thursday night. A lot of people call him Saviour and acknowledge him as King, but they refuse to truly make him Lord—to truly follow him and do his will in their families, their businesses, or even in the Church. A lot of people vow, just like Peter, that they will follow him forever and then they deny him when things get tough. A lot of people forget the humility of Jesus, and like the disciples get into disputes over who is the greatest and think they're above washing the feet of their brothers and sisters.

But friends, the Jesus who comes to us today is the same Jesus who sat with a dirty soldier's coat on his whipped and scourged back and with a crown of thorns pressed on his bloody head; who held a mock sceptre in his hand and had the spit of drunk soldiers running down his face. And because he's the same, we treat him the same way Jerusalem treated him. He's not like other kings. His Kingdom doesn't come with force. He doesn't beat us into submission as earthly kings do. No, he comes to us through the proclamation of the Gospel. And he sends the Holy Spirit to regenerate our hearts and to turn them to him. And yet we resist, because. We can't wrap our heads around a humble Messiah. Or maybe we can understand a humble Messiah, but we aren't willing to be humble as he is. We aren't willing to have the mind of Christ ourselves. We know that if we submit to his humble lordship, he's going to call us away from the things we love so much in this world.

And yet our Epistle reminds us that because of his humility, because of his willingness to be a servant:

God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

We have a choice today, whether or not we'll acknowledge Jesus as Lord. But when the Last Day comes, the choice will be gone. Paul says that one day *every* knee will bow and *every* tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Those who heard his call and embraced the Good News of his death and resurrection, they will bow before him as his loved subjects. But on that day there will be all the others who refused him. Many will have refused him because his call was so costly—they weren't willing to give up the things of this world. Others will have refused him as the Jews did. He wasn't the kind of king they wanted—they looked for an earthly king. (This may be the greatest danger to us, because it's subtle. We think that Jesus came to save our democratic society or to bring an end to poverty or an end to war. We forget that the only way these things can be saved is when men and women are saved themselves. Our relations can never be right until our hearts are right with God and until he's transformed us from the inside out.) But even those who refuse him will bow too on that day—but not as his loved subject, but as those who stand condemned before him as their judge.

This is the Palm Sunday theme: Our Saviour has come. Out of his great love for us, he comes humbly. He comes as man, that he might restore men and women to God. And we see that humility on dramatic display as the great King rides on a lowly donkey to his own death on a cross. And St. Paul points us to his loving humility and calls to us: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” By the

cross, he has restored us to himself. As God humbly shared in our humanity, he has exalted our humanity to his divinity that we set aside our sin, our pride, and our selfish ambition and, instead, live in service to each other and to him, spreading the Good News of our humble Saviour and eternally glorify our Lord and King.

Let us pray: “Almighty and everlasting God, who in your tender love towards mankind sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature and to suffer death upon the cross so that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility, grant that we may both follow the example of his patience and also have our part in his resurrection, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”