

POP PALM SUNDAY – 9.4.17

Text: Philippians 2: 5-11

Jesus comes into Jerusalem and the crowds flock to see him. You can't hold them back: they want to proclaim him as King. They've seen his miracles, they know what he can do, he's the One they've been waiting for, and now, as he enters the city of David, the headquarters of the nation, now is the time to acclaim him as king. Trouble is that when the tide turns, when he is arrested and the might of Rome shows its hand, then the voices are muted, then the shouts of *Hosanna* can't be heard, then the song of praise is replaced with the *Crucify him!* song.

It's so hard to understand how, in the space of a week, that can happen. But it seems like these people had expectations of Jesus and as long as he met those expectations they were prepared to take up the chant in his favour. When his destiny seemed different from what they had in mind, support just fades right away. It's almost like: "Jesus, you be what **we** want you to be and

we'll make a lot of noise. Be something else, and we will meet that with stony silence”.

Let me ask you: What kind of Jesus do you worship, do you follow? Are you prepared to be noisy as long as he is good to you? What happens to your relationship with this Jesus when the going is tough, when you don't see the light at the end of the tunnel? When you pray to him, when you sing about him, when you talk to him, what kind of Jesus do you think of? I guess we tend to think of him as a friend, perhaps a big brother, maybe as a king, because a king is pretty powerful! Could be that we see in him all the things we would like to be and aren't. He's someone to lean on, rely on, someone who can give us the strength we need for each day.

Think about it and I think it's true to say that we **need** a strong person in our lives. We, all of us, have times when we feel weak, unprotected, vulnerable. And we look for strength. Sometimes we build ourselves up and convince ourselves we're better than others: more capable, more experienced, more clever. Or we attach ourselves to people

who are stronger than we are so that we can lean on them for strength. It's not coincidence that as we grow up we identify heroes: sporting heroes, comic-book heroes, cartoon heroes, Superman and Batman and Wonder Woman and all the modern equivalents. Same goes for Jesus. The kids at Living Faith used to love singing a song that says exactly that: ***Jesus Your My Superhero***. What we like about him is that he is strong: see him calm the angry sea with just a word; see his miracles; see him get around a difficult question with an even cleverer answer. What excites us about Jesus is his strength, his power, the wonderful things he can do.

When you think of Jesus do you see bright lights and glory and cleanness and purity? Do you ever think of Jesus as a baby covered in all the gunk babies are covered with when they are born? Do you ever think of Jesus as a bawling baby crying for a feed at its mother's breast? A humble house, ordinary, uneducated parents, sweat and dust, a face hardened from the dry heat of the sun and the salt of the sea, a man mixing with lower class people, roaming around the countryside from town to town, a man with

very few possessions? Do you ever think of Jesus like that? Is the Jesus you worship someone who cried, who was tired, who felt alone; someone who knows what it's like to have spit in his eye, a slap on the face, a stick across his back? Someone who everyone makes fun of and laughs at and causes him shame? Someone who finally dies out the back of town on a rubbish heap called "The Skull", where criminals were punished and left to die? Remember how Jesus died: left to hang, possibly naked, for hours and hours in the hot sun until he slowly became dehydrated and each minute longer in that sun meant more torture and agony until he finally gave up living? The prophet Isaiah says, ***There was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him.***

You get the feeling that the people of Jerusalem didn't want to worship that kind of Jesus, but that's the Jesus from whom we get our name: Christ – Christian. In our minds we can surround everything with soft light and make it all look nice, but there wasn't much pretty about Jesus' life and yet his whole life is designed to show us what God is like! He moved around people without hope,

people depressed, people who had lost their pride. He touched the leper, the deformed, the mentally unstable, those whose lives were tortured by evil spirits – that’s also the Jesus we worship!

He became a servant, a slave. He was humble, he was obedient, he was God’s most loved son who poured out love all around him and he himself was mostly unloved. People followed him everywhere: “Jesus, heal me; Jesus forgive me; Jesus give me peace, show me the way!” and he healed and he forgave and he brought peace and hope, and who ever gave **him** anything? Jesus ***gave up all he had*** – he ***emptied himself*** – he gave out so that he was left with nothing – that’s Jesus.

And **that** Jesus is lord, ruler, supreme commander, prime minister, King of all creation! Every being, humans, animals, all creation: flowers and trees, rivers and mountains – everything bows down to him and calls him Lord. That Jesus is the number one person in our lives, the strong one become weak for us – that’s the Jesus we worship.

When it think about that I have to shake my head because I can't fathom it. It doesn't make sense. Why didn't he come and do lots of miracles and perhaps become king of the Jews instead of Herod, and get rid of all the Romans and set up his government and do things in style? That's what it seems the people of Jerusalem who welcomed him that first Palm Sunday wanted. He could have been the greatest king who ever lived – but he chose to be a donkey riding king instead of a war-horse riding one, he chose to become a servant.

And then I realise what it means that he is “Lord”. Then I remember why I want to kneel before him. Because he's also Lord of every teardrop – he's been there, he's felt the pain inside, the loneliness, not being accepted or appreciated – he knows it and he carried it and now he can help me in my time of tears. Because he is Lord of every disappointment – he's been there, he pleaded, he cried for people to listen, and they wouldn't. He's Lord of all helplessness – he knows how sickness and disease and even death can separate us and cut us off and leave us

feeling hopeless. Most of all he is the Lord of sin – he knows my shame, my guilt, my uncomfortable feelings when I do wrong and he carries the weight of my sin on his shoulders. When I think of those things, I understand why God chose that way for him and I want to ***fall down on my knees and openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is lord to the glory of God the Father.***

In this coming week the focus will be on Jesus as he goes to the cross. We will see his head crowned with thorns, his face slapped, the same face that looked at Peter and that look pierced his heart; we'll see his loving, healing, welcoming hands pinned back on the cross. We'll see the richness of his love as he forgives those every people who put him on the cross and taunt him while he hangs there. And in all those things Jesus is calling us. He is reaching out to us to become involved with him in a new adventure, a new road to walk, a new life. It's not just a story to stir up emotions, but it's a story to provide an answer for our lives. He calls us to join with millions of others who worship him as Lord and Saviour. Whatever deep valley you walk into - he's been there, he walks with you. Whatever burden you carry, he carries it for you because

he knows all about burden-carrying. In our minds we will see him with arms outstretched, dying for us – you can spit at him and laugh at him and dig your spear into his side, or you can accept that he is your lord, your King, he gives his life for your life, and then each day can become for you a time of worship of this One they called King that day in the streets of Jerusalem,

Don't just look for the Jesus you want! See him for what he is. The Jesus who became a servant, humbled himself, who was one with us, who died for us. And now the Jesus whom God exalted and who rules with him in glory forever. This coming week, worship again Jesus your Saviour, Jesus your Lord, Jesus your King!