

# Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021 – Palm Sunday

*Liturgy of the Palms: Mark 11.-11*

*Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 31.9-18; Philipians 2.5-11; Mark 15.1-39*

On Palm Sunday we survey the road to the Cross and beyond. There are huge contrasts. On one hand there is all the giddy hope of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem; a staged event of course, but still full of hope and anticipation. And then on the other hand there is the story of what is to come, the wormwood and the gall, death and tragedy. Traditionally on Palm Sunday, gospel readings on both themes are read. It is a day of contrasts.

Of course in God's purposes, the hope and the tragedy are both part of the plan, all part of the way that the humble and faithful Son of God must follow; all part of the plan that leads to rescue and liberation, and new life and new hope, for the whole world. The unifying theme, of both Palm Sunday and Good Friday, is the humility of Jesus, and in this respect the key reading for today is actually the one from St Paul's letter to the Philipians. "Being found in human form he humbled himself."

So Jesus chooses to enter Jerusalem as a servant, in peace, in humbleness. And it is a judgement on the authorities, both religious and otherwise, that they could not cope with this. For the last thing that human power in whatever guise really wants, is actually to be humble. The human ego sees to that. However the humility of the Cross was desperately needed, so that the world could come to see,, and understand, and know, that the power of God is different from the power of human authority.

The vital thing to note is that the humility of God is not weak. Divine humility is deeply strong. The humility of Jesus resounds down the ages, inspiring people from all walks of life to live more holy lives, more faithful lives, more humble lives, more truly great lives. Jesus of course knew that the world would fight back. Human authority often pretends to be humble in order to gain our allegiance, but it doesn't really believe in humility. Not like God does.

There is a fascinating contrast in the context of Holy Week currently being played out at Batley Grammar School in Yorkshire, where a school teacher has unwisely shown a derogatory cartoon of the prophet Mohammed to his class. At one level it is about freedom of expression and open enquiry and love of learning. At another level it is about how diverse communities make enough room for each other so that they can live together in peace without feeling insulted by one another. The insult is being felt both ways, not just by Muslims, but also by those who feel their freedom to ridicule anything and everything is being challenged. How dare they!

But there is a deeper spiritual theme here, especially in the context of Holy Week. Because of the Cross, Christians know that God is stronger than any insults that humanity can throw at him, and that God's way of changing people's hearts is to turn the other cheek, and show humility. That's why Jesus taught us to be children of God by doing the same thing. It may look and feel like weakness, but actually it is a deeper strength, a strength that comes from

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knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and nothing can defeat the love of God.

The furore at Batley Grammar School is not really about God at all, it is about how different communities should respect one another, about the humility that each needs to have in relationship to the other. Such humility, such compassion, may at times look like weakness, but in God's hands it is real strength.

The strength of divine humility is something that the world is going to need a lot as it emerges from the pandemic. As our lockdown relaxes, as the immediate danger passes, there are going to be many outbursts of emotion; of distress and anger and frustration and grief. We have already seen a number of examples welling up. Things people have put up with for many years will continue to boil over, often rightly so and not before time. But there will sadly often be rather more heat than light. The desire of course is to build back better, but the road will often be beset with grief and anger at all that has been and is still being lost.

Into this maelstrom of political and personal emotion and pain, Christians place the Cross. Indeed God has placed the Cross in human history; to draw the sting of human insecurity, grief and anger, and to remind us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. That whatever else we may lose or have lost, the love of God is never lost, never defeated, whatever insults are thrown at him. For divine humility is immeasurably stronger than human power. Amen.

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