

Sunday Thought

10th April 2022 Palm Sunday Sixth in Lent

Readings

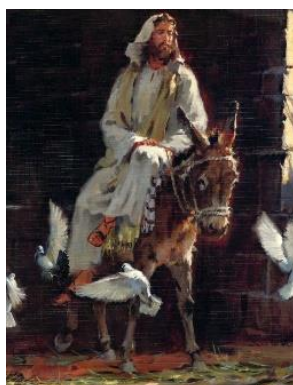
Isaiah 42: 1 - 9

Psalm 118

Philippians 2: 5 - 11

Luke 19: 28 - 40

Real Power



The theme of 'power' dominates the news – the cost of power to heat our homes, to sustain employment and provide basic needs, like our transport and food for our children All this against a background of super-power and the aggression of dominant nations. Power of a different kind is suggested by our scripture readings today, featuring King Jesus on his Palm Sunday procession.

In a recent radio interview, a Ukrainian refugee expressed sincere gratitude for the hospitality afforded him in a strange land, *'I am very grateful'*, he said, *'but I don't intend to stay. I want to go home as soon as I can!'* He echoed the longings of Hebrew refugees in Babylon trusting God to give them a powerful leader who will take them home to rebuild their land. The words from Isaiah are one of four songs about *The Lord's Servant* who will be that leader – the Messiah – a King over all kings. The description of this powerful leader of God's choice would raise questions among his people because he would not be their typical image of royal power. He will be more than a national leader. His reign will be universal. He will rule fairly, with justice for all human life and all creation too. Unselfish, he will be filled with the Spirit of God. He will be a king of love. Not shouting his campaign politics on the city streets, he will not be destructive or abusive. He will encourage his people and inspire their hope. His overall aim will be the glory of God. Now, that is newsworthy! It is generally accepted that Isaiah's God-inspired servant songs point to Jesus and were fulfilled in him. It sometimes takes an enormous measure of faith to hold on to God's promise but in Jesus' own teaching we are assured of his royal role as God's Son. John's revelation confirms him as *'Lord of lords and King of kings for ever!'*

With all this in mind, Palm Sunday becomes a great affirmation of Jesus' divine ruling power. Pilgrims from all over the world would have been singing Psalm 118, among others, and these words from Isaiah, as they processed towards the city and the House of God. Luke's picture of Jesus highlights the prophet's vision of a different kind of kingship. He came, not in a procession of armoured tanks but on a donkey foal; not with a parade of threatening missiles but a crowd of ordinary sinful folk waving branches from nearby palm trees; not with brutal force but gentle love; not selfish ambition but sacrificial self-giving; not signs and wonders but the sign of a cross on his donkey's back. He was to bear all the pain of God for the mistakes and tears of every life and all world history.

Writing to the church at Philippi, Paul continues the theme of Jesus as the fulfilment of Gods' servant king. He is God in our human likeness, living in total obedience to the Father, sharing our pain, and dying for our freedom to be what God wants us to be. His power is over evil and death, bringing a new life of new beginnings. Paul then says, *now it is up to you*, IN Christ and sharing his lifelikeness of obedient love you must share with him the trials and sufferings of others – bringing them freedom and healing as you live for the glory of God.

The Jerusalem pilgrims would have been singing other psalms on their way to the Temple and traditionally psalm 24 would be included - *'Fling wide the gates! Open the ancient doors for the King of glory to come in!'* I think of that psalm when I hear church bells on a Sunday and think how great it will be if every week the whole Christian community made their way to the one local church place, waving their banners and chorusing, *'Open the doors. Jesus is here! God is with us! Come and meet the greatest power in the universe!'* I love the words of the Christian philosopher Pierre de Teilhard Chardin, *'The day will come when after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. On that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire!'* A dream? Yes, but Jesus calls us to dream and to believe his sure promises. I am privileged to have seen many instances of the dream come true – in acts of forgiveness and reconciliation – in selfless service and giving – in changed lives and homes. Let's dream on into the joy and wonder of Easter!

A Prayer (with Psalm 118 in mind)

Lord, it is good to find your presence everywhere
with opportunity to thank you.
You are good, and aware of the prayers and desires
we express in word and thought.
All the goodness we know and share comes from you.
We live with the assurance that your love is eternal.
It is the greatest power in the universe.
You are in control of all life's up-side-down incongruities.
You will never fail us. You're the greatest.
May all people everywhere learn your ways.

