

[Luke 19:28-40](#)

Earlier this week I was asking one of my churches whether we had a stock of palm crosses to give out for Palm Sunday. But not to worry if we didn't, I told them, we could (in the words of [one biblical scholar](#)) call it 'No Palm Sunday.'

You'll note I didn't say Napalm Sunday – although that might be a Scottish pronunciation!

Why 'No Palm Sunday'? All four Gospel writers tell the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the lead-up to his death. But Luke, whose account we read, doesn't mention the spreading of palm branches. It's a detail he misses out. He talks about the crowd spreading their cloaks on the ground instead. Maybe we should wave coats instead of palm branches – what do you think?

Be that as it may, if you're an experienced Christian you'll know from sermons in the past how the way Jesus enters Jerusalem signals his claim to be the Messiah, and he signals that he's not coming with an army but in humility. I'm going to assume those things this year rather than go over them again. Instead, I'm going to look at what Luke's account tells us about how Jesus exercises his kingly status.

Firstly, King Jesus acts in *power*:

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

You would expect a king in those days to exercise power. But the way Jesus uses his power is in the performing of miracles.

Most of the miracles the disciples had seen were healings. They had also seen him use his power and authority over the elements to calm a storm. In other words, King Jesus used his great power that demonstrated his kingdom as acts of compassion for people.

And the crowd don't know it, but in the coming week they are going to see the power of their King in unexpected ways. His weakness in dying on the Cross will be an act of power to bring the forgiveness of sins. His raising from the dead will bring new life.

Jesus doesn't use his power to push people around or humiliate them. He uses his kingly power in compassion.

What does this mean for us if we live under his reign? A couple of things: firstly, it means that Jesus has compassion for us. Yes, as King he has the right to tell us what he wants us to do. But he is not bullying us. And he takes note of our frailties. He helps us with our weakness to sin. He is there with us and to act for us in our trials and pains.

Secondly, we are called to reflect his compassionate power in the world. This is a key part of our witness to him. Where can I show compassion this week, Lord? How about making that a regular prayer?

It may involve offering sanctuary to Ukrainian refugees. It may be caring for a neighbour along the road. It may be praying for someone who needs the intervention of Jesus in their lives.

What is certain is this: if King Jesus uses his power in compassion, then his church acting in compassion in the community should not be an exceptional thing. It should be the norm.

Secondly, King Jesus comes in *peace*:

³⁸ 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!'

'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. Those words should sound familiar to readers of Luke's Gospel. They are so like the song of the angels who announced the birth of Jesus in Luke 2:

¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

It's something the early church majored on. You only have to look at the way the Apostle Paul began his letters. The standard way to begin a letter in his culture was to greet people with the word 'Grace'. He went one further. He began with 'Grace and peace.'

But what kind of peace? I don't think there are any limits. We cannot separate off peace with God from peace with our neighbours – remember the connection between giving and receiving forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer.

King Jesus is riding into Jerusalem, whose very name means 'City of peace', to bring this all-encompassing peace. But what the crowd of disciples hasn't realised is that the way he will bring that peace will be by what happens a few days later, as he is nailed to the Cross. In his death, God offers peace to us. And that costly peace calls us to be peacemakers with others.

This challenges churches to be communities of peace. If we believe the Gospel, we won't necessarily agree on everything, but we will deal with our differences peaceably. We will have the joy of knowing that we are forgiven sons and daughters of the living God. And we will seek peace in our communities. I saw this in Knaphill a few years ago when two businesses were in serious conflict. Someone from the Baptist church offered their services as a mediator. It wasn't successful – success isn't guaranteed – but that person was living out the Gospel of peace.

So if you want to put Palm Sunday (or even No-Palm Sunday) into practice, go and make peace with somebody.

Thirdly and finally, King Jesus receives *praise*:

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!'

⁴⁰ 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

When our daughter was about three years old, she used to love to dance to the music of the hymns in church. She would dance in the aisle, or maybe up front next to me. One day she was dancing in an all age service when a grumpy man in his eighties bellowed at her to stop.

The Pharisees are still with us. If we become embittered or cynical we will be offended by joyful praise.

Ian Paul, whom I quoted at the beginning, says that there may even be a pun behind the comments of Jesus in the original speech. For *eben*, the Hebrew word for 'stones', is close to *ben*, the word for 'son'. If the sons of Israel won't praise then the stones will, says Jesus.

Stones? Inanimate objects? Maybe it's poetry, in the same way that many Psalmists envisage the time when all of creation will praise its Maker – 'the trees of the field will clap their hands', and many other passages reveal this sentiment.

For Jesus is not just King over individuals: he is King over all of creation. When we Christians engage in creation care, we have much loftier ideals for the whole creation. It's not just a case of ensuring that the earth survives, it's a case of being good stewards and leading 'everything that has breath' to praise the Lord.

We know this crowd of disciples will be shocked later in the week when a different crowd is whipped up into a frenzy and demands the execution of Jesus. But the disciples will discover the healing power of the Cross, and the healing of creation in the Resurrection.

So what about us? Have we allowed ourselves to become so cynical like the Pharisees, perhaps through years of disappointment in the church and the Christian faith, that we are more like The Grinch than Jesus? If heartfelt praise offends us, then we have a heart problem.

If that describes any of us, then I offer the invitation to use Holy Week as a time to reset and to heal. Take time to get alongside Jesus as he teaches in the Temple, as he issues amazing rebuttals to his critics, and then as he is silent before most of his accusers and goes to his suffering on our behalf.

Then, when we have drunk deeply of that – and only when we have – let the joy and craziness of Easter morning touch your soul. Let the stones – and the sons and daughters – cry out.

So – Jesus is a very different king. For him, not the power of coercion but the power of love. For him, not peace enforced by the jackboot, but peace brought by his own suffering. For him, praise not coming from crowds bussed in and forced to parade but from those captivated by his self-giving love.

This king is worthy of our allegiance.