

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
April 13, 2014**

Confusions the Public Ministry

**John 12:12-13 & Psalm 118:9-29
(188, 205, 218, 220)**

What do you think of when you hear the word 'King'?

I've been pondering that over the past couple of weeks as I've been preparing to reflect publically on this Palm Sunday text.

The story is familiar to many.
I remember a poster from Sunday School
with a very white, clean, handsome Jesus
surrounded by a crowd, with children prominent, waving palm branches.
It's festival time in Jerusalem – the major Jewish festival of Passover.
It's a time for remembering what God did for Israel in the Exodus,
their release from captivity in Egypt
and their arrival in the Promised Land,
to be ruled by judges and kings chosen by God to bless them.
These were the chosen people of God
being ruled wisely and justly by the chosen ones of God.
Well, not so wisely and justly a lot of the time.
That's what the prophets were about –
reminding God's chosen people of what God really intended
and how distorted that vision had become among them.
That's the tradition in Judaism that Jesus identified with,
that Jesus revived in his teaching and actions,
in his attitudes and behaviours.
To have in us, as Paul urges, the 'mind of Christ'
is to understand and witness for our day
what the prophetic Jesus understood and witnessed to in his day.

That's why understanding what Jesus meant by 'King'
becomes so important to being faithful followers of Jesus, the Christ.

When I hear the word 'King,'
I think of power and privilege.
Royal people have power granted to them.
In the old days, it was seen to be granted by God.

You may have heard of the medieval doctrine
of the divine rights of kings.
Their rights to power and privilege
came from God and therefore were not to be challenged
in any way, no matter how bad they were as rulers.
Tyranny was to be tolerated.

There were protests against these kinds of kings all along.
Gradually, what emerged was a way of organizing our common life
that included the voice of the people in ruling their affairs.
The Presbyterian branch of the Christian community
had a major role to play in both thinking through and enacting
what has become known as democracy –
literally, in the original Greek, the power (kratia) of the people (demos).
Indeed, the first basic principle of Presbyterian polity or governance is this:

*“To take away all occasion of tyranny,” our Lord wills
that office-bearers in his church “should rule with mutual consent of the [people],
And equality of power, every one according to [their] function.”*

So, when Session meets after lunch today
to consider and decide about the best ways
Brentwood can nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ,
we do so knowing that we can be called by God,
confirmed by you, and ordained by Christ’s church
to rule as Christ would rule among and for us all.

That’s a very different way of understanding royal power
than many have.

That’s a very different way of understanding royal rule
than many have.

That’s a very different way of governing people
than happens in many places in our world today.

Much more common, tragically, is the kind of tyranny –
one person’s or party’s power imposed on people for the benefit of a few.

Palm Sunday is the beginning of a week in human history
when the royal assumptions about being a king
were transformed forever.

The temptations to assume that kind of tyrannical power
remain ever present,
whether its in countries, community organizations, or churches, or families.
Tyrannical authority in any body of God’s beloved children
is simply wrong.
It’s an affront to God’s intent in creating capable and dignified human beings.

So, what do we make of this particular,
one might say, peculiar,
King of the Jews
who arrives in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover?

We'll be exploring this question in much greater detail
throughout the rest of 2014
as we focus on Jesus' teaching,
especially in the focus he generates on the Kingdom of God.

There's a strong indication of the kind of king Jesus is
in a section of John's story of Palm Sunday
that we did not read.

It has to do with Jesus arriving on a young donkey,
not the usual mode of arrival for royalty.
The Jews of Jesus' day would have understood the symbolism.
It comes from a passage in the writings of the prophet Zechariah
Where the prophet talks about the coming ruler of God's people:

*Lo, your king comes to you:
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
(Zechariah 9:9)*

With the coming of this king,
God's intent for a community of *Shalom*,
of peace and well-being for all,
will be revealed afresh and restored.

That's what Jesus had in mind on Palm Sunday.
It was consistent with his whole public ministry.
He was clear about that,
however confused others, including his disciples,
might have been.
The Jewish authorities of his day – the royal priests and their supporters –
were clear as well.

This was a claimant to royalty that had to be eliminated.
His vision of a Godly community clashed fundamentally with theirs.
So they conspired to have him crucified.

The difference, it seems to me, between confusion and clarity
around the kind of king Jesus actually is
the humility we have in understanding and following
this particular and peculiar King.

Are we in accepting and appreciative touch with the teachable spirit
God has given us?

Are we curious about what following Jesus in our day and age
really means in terms of loving God, others, and ourselves?

Are we ready to stand with Jesus
through all the persecution and brutality
that he will experience through this Holy Week ahead?

Those are the questions this particular and peculiar King
has left me with this week.
We'll work on answers together over the next several months,
but for now, in God grace and wisdom,
perhaps the best response is to simply sit with the questions.

Sitting with the questions is an interesting discipline,
an interesting place to stay for a season.

It's a place where distorted and destructive ideas
about power and privilege
are undermined.

It's a place where new possibilities
of peace, justice, and well-being emerge,
often in conversation about the questions with others.

It's a place where souls are nourished
by the constant provocations of the Holy Spirit
to flourish in the grace of this particular and peculiar King,
Jesus, the Christ.

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