

Reflection Palm Sunday 2020

I have been thinking that this must be an unsettling time for those who make their living as celebrities. No-one is quite as interested in them as they were a few weeks ago. They are not even allowed to go out anymore. They have become just like us.

Jesus, we read in this passage, is a somewhat reluctant celebrity. It is clear he has become well known: there is great excitement, chaos, almost a sense of hysteria in the image of crowds who are throwing their cloaks on the floor in front of him as he enters Jerusalem. He can do no wrong. They can't wait to see what he will do next. Will he raise up an army? Will he heal their friends and neighbours? Will he continue to outwardly challenge their religious leaders and ruling powers? And if he does – what will the consequences be?

The man who enters Jerusalem on a donkey is not influenced by their excitement. He doesn't change who he is to fit in with their expectations. He chooses a donkey – not a horse, or a camel – to ride into Jerusalem. He is a strange sort of celebrity who does not court popularity, even amongst those who would do anything for him.

For us, this is just the beginning of the long week of Holy Week. We look forward and see the teaching, the healing, the conflict, the worship, the last meal, the betrayal, the death and despair, and finally the resurrection, new hope and new life.

And it does not escape our notice that some of those who shout hosanna today, will be shouting "crucify" in a few days' time. So it is with all celebrities – adulated one day, ripped apart by the press the next - human nature seems to love to bring down what was once revered.

We too are inconsistent servants of Christ. We call on him when we need him, and then we forget about him. We worship him in our Churches or in our homes, but we are ashamed of him in front of our neighbours. Palm Sunday reminds us of that inconsistency, and it nevertheless offers us hope.

Because it turns out that Christ is prepared to die for the inconsistent. He dies for Peter who tells Jesus he will lie down his life for him one day and deny that he knows him the next. He dies for a guilty thief who is grasping at straws as he is crucified for his crimes. And – yes – he dies for all those people who cry “hosanna” one moment and “crucify him” the next. We too are the ones for whom he pleads forgiveness, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”.

It is important that we are able to acknowledge our innate inconsistency – we are not saved through our own efforts, but through God’s love. Nevertheless, we may also choose to take this Sunday as an opportunity to commit to trying to be more consistent followers of Christ. If others begin to despair or turn on one another in coming weeks, let us commit to consistency of love, hope and service. Where once we might have been influenced by the crowd, the voices of our media, the grumblings of community, let us choose to be beacons of joy, celebrating even when times are hard. If some begin to suffer from “compassion fatigue”, let us be the ones who continue to check on our neighbours, pray for the suffering and remind one another of better times to come. These days will pass, just as Holy Week will, and they will end in resurrection hope. In the meantime, let us walk Holy Week together in faith, hope and love, accompanying Christ on his walk to the cross, and to new life beyond.