

04.10.22 – Palm Sunday. Luke 19: 28-40

We might well imagine that, later when the disciples looked back on the triumphal entrance of Jesus, they had mixed emotions. It had been a grand and glorious day, filled with everything any public figure could ask for. First, the timing was perfect - it was the Passover celebration and the city would be filled with capacity crowds as entire families made the journey from distant farms and towns. The atmosphere was exciting; the gaiety of Disney World combined with the reverence of Gettysburg, PA. And tension was in the air. Even the foreign born Roman guards knew the Passover commemorated the mighty act of God's liberator, Moses, who challenged Pharaoh to 'let my people go', and led the Hebrews into freedom.

Like the beautiful backdrop of a Broadway production, the Holy City and the awesome Temple set the scene for the arrival of the Messiah. Not just any king was coming, but the king who comes in the name of the Lord! This was the prophecy. The disciples moved easily among the crowd telling everyone who would listen that this Jesus, from Nazareth, riding on a donkey is a sign of ancient hope fulfilled, was the one they were waiting for. So far, so good. If there was a plan, and it certainly looked to the disciples that Jesus had a plan, all was proceeding as it should.

There was push back from those who were threatened by all of this. They worried. They were anxious. How would Pontius Pilate, with his terrible temper and brutish insensitivities, react to this unarmed crowd of revelers shouting, "Hosanna, Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" Some pleaded with Jesus, "For God's sake, can't you keep them quiet!"

"I tell you, if they were silent, the very stones would cry out."

The disciples continue shouting, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" and the crowd, too. Their shouts as they entered Jerusalem were right on the money. Jesus was the King who came in the name of the Lord. When the disciples remembered this day, this entrance and their high hopes and dreams, were they embarrassed by the memory of their expectations? Luxury homes. Signet rings to seal and send off important documents. Ivory combs. Sweet cedar charcoal burning. Did they chuckle at the dignified and upset Pharisees who bustled about trying to divert the marchers from entering the city - but not getting too close to those of uncertain cleanliness - it was vital to remain ritualistically pure before celebrating Passover. Did they have the grace to laugh at themselves because they thought living like a king in Israel meant living like the king of Babylon or the Roman emperor, when living like King Jesus really meant serving like a slave, travelling like a beggar, facing false charges in criminal court, denied access to the synagogue, suffering rejection by family and friends, and dying like a criminal?

There is no way we can know how involved, if at all, in the planning of the entrance of Jesus into the city. But this, I believe, we can know; that as they remembered that day, they knew that they had done as Jesus wanted; that they had served their King as loyal subjects. They would have felt good about that, perhaps, but then they would also remember on that wonderful, festive occasion, they missed something of the true nature of this new kingdom of Jesus in which they were numbered. They laid down their robes and garments because they expected, soon, to be wearing new robes in keeping with their new status within the royal court of the Nazarene's soon to be

inaugurated kingdom. But as the days of the week we have come to call Holy Week came and went, they learned the true nature of His kingdom as followers of Jesus. There would not be a fancy throne on a raised platform for Jesus however; his royal throne was to be rough cut wooden beams in the shape of a cross. Nailed to the cross, he was raised above the crowd on the hill of the skull - Golgotha.

Kings and queens are largely out of fashion politically in the 21st century, but we know from history that the loyal followers of royalty would profess their faith in the monarch usually on bended knee and offering a sword or kissing a ring. I seldom want a large screen in a sanctuary as lovely as this sanctuary, but today I wish there was one hanging up there. On it I would project an image of the seal of John Calvin; but without a projector I must resort to words and gestures. The seal of John Calvin - an extended hand holding a stylized heart with the initial J C for Jean Calvin, or perhaps Jesus Christ. Calvin secured his letters with this seal impressed on hot wax, and in one such letter he wrote But, he wrote ...”when I remember that I am not my own, *I offer up my heart presented as a sacrifice to God.*”¹

Jesus is our King. We offer ourselves to serve faithfully in his peculiar kingdom not of this world. Our hearts come in all kinds and shapes, large and small, with defects, damaged, and broken, unaesthetic, and some may even look like tomatoes or sausages. And if we are honest with ourselves, we offer these sinful hearts in a stumbling, painfully awkward way, and often without the confident assurance

So, dear friends, during difficult times you look into your own heart and ask yourself, “What am I really doing here? Does it amount to anything? Do I actually believe in the peace of Christ? Are we really equipped to be agents of reconciliation and renewal in such a conflicted world in such polarized times?” Then, don’t lose heart. Continue, pray, and be your best Christian self, and know that God accepts and blesses our modest, clumsy, bungling, misshapen heart work. Through Christ, what we give from the heart is redeemed and made beautiful. John Calvin, a modest and very humble man, professed this attitude on his seals. He knew that the heart he offers to the Lord is a sacrifice to God in need of Christ’s redemptive love. For this reason he surrounded it with the initials of God’s son.² This is a day to remember the palms of the royal parade entering Jerusalem, and a day to remember the passion of disciples to offer their hearts willingly, sincerely, to their king.



¹ (*Letters of John Calvin*, ed. Jules Bonnet, 1858, vol.1, p. 99. Latin text from Epistolae Nr.248 in *Calvini Opera* vol.11, 1873.)

² Paraphrase of <https://calvin.edu/about/history/calvin-seal.html>

"Prompte" has to do with the disposition of the spirit and will within us and not so much with being on time and doing something right away without procrastinating, as the modern translation suggests. The Latin juxtaposition of "prompte et sincere" predates John Calvin. In Catherine of Sienna, for example, "prompte et sincere" is the description of her offering of obedience to God and her spiritual superior in her "De Obediencia." The juxtaposition of "prompte and sincere" appears in other prereformational texts to qualify obedience. Examples can be found in Tertullian and Aquinas.

