

Sermon
20 March 2016
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: Luke 19:28-40

On Friday evening André, the boys and I watched a film on telly, entitled “Enchanted”. It’s about a fairy-tale princess who gets pushed *out* of the fairy-tale by the wicked witch, all the way into real life New York City; because, according to the witch, that’s the one place the princess will never find a “happily ever after”.

As you can probably imagine, this fairy-tale princess looked quite out of place in modern day New York, with her huge princess dress on, but even more so because of the naïve way in which she trusts everybody and can’t see the bad in anything.

Some people who saw her stopped and stared, others just gave her a puzzled look and carried on with whatever they were busy with, probably thinking: “Oh, some people!!”, but not really giving it a second thought. And all this time she was desperate for a kind person to help her make sense of what was going on.

And you know, this made me think of Jesus. Of how *he* stood out – how that attracted some people to him, but made others think that he was some kind of a freak! How frustrating it must have been for him to try to

explain to people what life was really about, but all they could see was what they *wanted* to see.

Jesus probably felt and looked just as out of place in 1st century Palestine, as the fairy-tale princess in New York.

Especially the day he entered Jerusalem on the donkey...

Now you might wonder why he did this?

He had *walked* all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem, so it's not as if he was now too tired to walk the last 100 yards or so into Jerusalem, but he knew that he had to fulfil an Old Testament prophesy. In Zechariah 9:9 it states: "Rejoice greatly, o Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Jerusalem was bursting out of its seams with people who had come to celebrate the Passover Festival. Entering the city on the back of a donkey as Jesus did, was typical behaviour for a king in those days. Except that the animal wouldn't be a donkey, but a horse. No wonder the crowds gathered to see what was going on!

Come to think of it – all these years later not much has changed! Because if the British Royal family have any special occasions to celebrate, people line the streets even just to get a glimpse of them,

waving flags, handing out flowers and cheering, as the horses gallop proudly, by followed by the royals themselves in horse-drawn carriages or fancy cars.

Through all the centuries – people are just people – curious, excited to be a part of the action.

So the palm branches were waved and people threw their clothes down in front of the donkey. This wasn't exactly the same as handing a posy of flowers to Queen Elizabeth today, because remember, those people only had one set of clothes, and their outer garments would be the only blankets they had as well. But still they regarded honouring Jesus as more important than their own comfort.

But, as I told the children, Jesus wasn't an ordinary king. And very shortly the people would realize that. He didn't want to enter the city triumphantly on a horse, because in those days horses were associated with war, usually with the powerful oppressors, and that was not who Jesus was. He was a different kind of king. A servant king. Who entered the city in peace, on the back of an animal which was used for hard work.

We call Jesus the *servant king*. But have you ever given this any thought? What is a "servant king"? In ordinary life, a servant and a king are opposites! A king can't be a servant, and a servant can't be a king!

"Servant king" is a figure of speech called an oxymoron, like a "losing champion" or an "exact estimate", where two opposing concepts are used together. We can't be servants and kings at the same time, but that

is exactly what Jesus was – a king who came to serve. Jesus doesn't rule *over* us, he rules *for* us.

The crowds in Jerusalem didn't yet understand this. They thought he was going to be an ordinary king, - the promised Messiah who was going to lead his people in victory over their Roman oppressors and restore them to what they once used to be.

But the *donkey* must have been the give-away. Jesus wasn't a political leader, and he didn't come to fight. The people would soon discover this. And less than a week later the smiling faces and palm branches of the crowds would be replaced by frowns and fists swinging in the air, not shouting the words of Psalm 118:26, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord" anymore, but "Crucify him, crucify him!"

In 1st century Palestine ordinary people had no right to vote, and shouting in a crowd was their only voice. Very quickly, between Palm Sunday and Good Friday, the crowds' perception of Jesus changed from "king" to "criminal". That must have been *some* week! Because from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, the opinions of those who believed in Him changed again... But we'll talk all about that later through the week, as we walk this journey with him...

What does all this mean for us today? Most importantly Holy Week reminds us that Jesus *is* our king, our *servant* king, who came to suffer and die to save us.

But we've also seen that although we are centuries and continents removed from what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, ultimately, people

are still people, and we can be so easily influenced by what other people say and do. We don't like being the odd one out; we get pulled into mass hysteria about things very quickly.

By means of social media, we can be part of the "crowd" shouting about things anywhere in the world, but precisely because we *can* make our voices heard today, because we are *allowed* an opinion and we *have* the right vote, we need to make sure that we say the right things.

We need to make sure that we don't just chant along because that is what everybody else does; we need to say the right things, in the right way, like Jesus would have done: Head held high, knowing that what lies ahead won't be easy, but will be worth all the pain.

I think we need to be "following leaders", our own oxymoron! We need to *follow* our servant king, and do that in such a way that we *lead* other people to do the same.

Let's never just shout along with the crowd, but let's not be quiet either. Let's think and pray first before we make our voices heard, so that *when* we speak, others will find it worth listening to us.

Jesus knew that there was a colt waiting for him around the corner, and that the owner would happily lend it to him. Jesus knew he was riding to his death on that donkey, although the crowds didn't see that yet.

Jesus knows what lies around the corner for all of us too, although we have no idea ourselves. So let's *trust* this man who gave his **all** for us,

and follow him *all* the time, whether the crowds around us do the same or not.

Jesus came out of his world into ours, almost like the fairy-tale princess, except, this really happened. And if we believe in him, one day we will join him in his world, where – although it's *not* a fairy-tale – there *are* “happily-ever-afters”!

Amen