

## Sermon – *Palm Sunday: Who is this Jesus?*

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**Athelstone Uniting Church #62**  
**14 April 2019**

**Text:** Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 and Luke 19:28-40 [NIV]

Let the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of our hearts  
be acceptable in your sight, O Lord,  
our strength and our redeemer.

**Amen.**

They say that “Everyone Loves a Parade” ...

processions, pageants, parades, rallies – they always seem to draw out a crowd. People cheering and waving flags. Floats and Marching bands.

People to honour and celebrate: Visiting dignitaries, sports heroes, returned soldiers, the royals, Santa..

Everyone loves a parade!

Last year a few of us had the opportunity to march in our own local parade – the Christmas Pageant! The streets were lined with families waving. It was a joyous occasion!

Then there are the military parades – shows of military might with soldiers marching in precision, weapons on display, tanks and other vehicles of war, and deafening military fly-bys.

Micah Halpern writes that “Military parades have a long and illustrious history. By most accounts, they began in ancient Mesopotamia. Rulers designed their cities with ‘friezes’ (sculptures on buildings) atop citadels, buildings and gates depicting their great victories. They then triumphantly marched their armies through the gates, under the arches and alongside those buildings. In Babylon, when kings returned home from battle, they entered through the famous gate of Ishtar and then marched through the city and under the approving stares of 60 enormous statues of lions

Rome took their military parades to new levels. The word "parade" did not sufficiently convey the importance of their conquests and return. Parades were now called "triumphs" and in a display of their great victories, captives and plunder were paraded in front of roaring crowds.

These days, Nations in the Middle East, Russians, Chinese and North Koreans are some of the countries still hosting these parades and showing off their military wares.<sup>1</sup>

So, imagine if you will, what a parade might have looked like at this time when Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem..

A 'Triumph' would have been

escorted by the citizens or in the case of a conquering king, their army

A 'Triumph' would have been

accompanied by cheers and acclamations

A 'Triumph' would have

included lots of symbols, showing the might and authority of the King. A King would have been riding a great stallion and would have been accompanied by lots of armed soldiers, as well as their prisoners and loot.

And a 'Triumph' would have

been followed by a ritual, something like a sacrifice in the temple, by which the King would symbolically seize power over the city.

Now the Jews who were gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover Festival – as well as being familiar with the Romans' way of doing things - would have been very familiar with Psalm 118 – a Psalm that described a ceremonial procession that would end with an act of Thanks giving. A procession that would have been led by the King. This Psalm was used at Passover – it celebrated God's faithfulness in the past through the Exodus and deliverance from Exile, and it gave hope for the future even in the face of oppression.

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<sup>1</sup> Micah D. Halpern, Columnist; Social and political commentator [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/everyone-loves-a-parade\\_b\\_5298111](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/everyone-loves-a-parade_b_5298111)

So into this context..

Roman occupation,

the crowds gathering for Passover,

..comes Jesus

Like a Triumph, Jesus is escorted into Jerusalem by people – in this case a whole crowd of disciples

Like a Triumph, the crowd calls out hymns of acclamation, quoting Psalm 118

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord – and they've added 'king" – blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Like a Triumph there are symbols to show Jesus' authority

- there is the way that Jesus knew where to find a colt,
- there is the spreading of cloaks, and (in other translations) the waving of palm branches,
- people are calling out loudly, praising God for the miracles they had seen,
- and praising Jesus as the one who will bring peace and glory in heaven – a ruler in heaven and on earth!

Like a Triumph Jesus 'seizes' the city by prophetically weeping over it (verse 41) and then later, drove traders out of the Temple.

For those who knew the Scriptures they would have drawn the connection to Psalm 118 and hoped that Jesus as Messiah was part of God's saving plan – just as God had saved them in the Exodus and from Exile.

They must have seen the connection to the prophecy of Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

<sup>10</sup> I will take away the chariots from Ephraim  
and the warhorses from Jerusalem,  
and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)

They would have been familiar with 2 Kings 9:12-13,:

‘This is what the LORD says: I anoint you king over Israel.’”

<sup>13</sup> They quickly took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, “Jehu is king!”

And so they would have thrown down their cloaks before Jesus as a sign of praise.

Yet, there was something not quite right...

Wasn't Jesus coming as their King? Their Messiah? Their Saviour? Could he be the One who could save them from oppression?

But *why* was he riding a lowly colt? The foal of a donkey.. and not a great stallion?

If you looked around at the crowd – it was made up mostly of his disciples – a motley bunch of fishermen, tax collectors, Samaritans, people from the streets, unclean,

Alan Culpepper suggests:

“There were women who now leaped for joy, a Samaritan leper with a heart full of gratitude, a crippled woman who had been unable to stand straight with dignity for 18 years, and a blind man who had followed Jesus all the way from Jericho. The cloaks thrown on the road that day were not expensive garments but tattered shawls and dusty sweat stained rags. Jesus was the king of the oppressed and the suffering. He shared their hardships, relieved their sufferings, accepted them when others deemed them unacceptable, gave them hope, and embodied God's love for them.”<sup>2</sup>

Their hope was riding into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey.. Did their picture of a Messiah match the picture of Jesus that was passing before them that day? For those journeying with

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Culpepper in The New Interpreter's Bible Volume 9, page 370

Jesus that week, none of this would have made sense. Why didn't he use his godly power to come in as a conquering hero and smite those Romans? Why?

Roddy Hamilton wrote a reflection on what it must have been like for those who there that day.. It is called, He Has Left.

he has left  
it was just a short moment he was here  
a glimpse only  
of the messiah  
a shadow of what we had expected  
he has left  
and the few palm branches  
a discarded sandal  
is all that's left  
of the messianic parade  
he has left  
and there is only disappointment to fill the space  
for nothing happened  
heaven didn't open  
angelic armies didn't descend  
the kingdom of God did not arrive  
he has left  
and all hope with him  
the crowd thought their moment had come  
but it hadn't  
they'll turn on him  
for he led them on  
with nowhere to go  
he has left  
and for his own safety  
and that of his disciples  
that is no bad thing<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ~ written by Roddy Hamilton, and posted on **Mucky Paws**. <http://www.nkchurch.org.uk/index.php/mucky-paws>

Centuries later, we have the advantage, if you like, of knowing what came next. We know what a week Jesus was about to go through. The Pharisees telling them to 'shoosh' was the first sign of opposition that was to come his way in Jerusalem that week. (Don't get the attention of the Roman soldiers! Jesus, tell them to shoosh!)

We know that many in the crowds who hailed Jesus as king on this Sunday would be crying out for his crucifixion by Friday.<sup>4</sup>

We know that in the days to come he went through unspeakable pain and suffering— eventually having to drag his cross through the streets – a parade of shame – to the place of his crucifixion.

We know the good news that on the third day he rose again.

But what a way to show the world that Christ is the true King.

What a way to show that God cares for the least.

What a way to show that Christ can overcome death.

Our own thoughts and imaginations can come up with all kinds of ways that God is going to help us – how God will answer all our prayers, no matter how self-centred – how God will provide for our every need into the future – and will make us wealthy and successful and..

Dr Elizabeth Johnson asks:

How quickly does our faith falter when God does not deliver what we are expecting?

How quickly does our discipleship falter when we realize the great cost and risks of following Jesus?

How often do our self-serving instincts lead us to deny Jesus and his claim on our lives?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Johnson: Working Preacher

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We need to be careful not to form an image of God in our minds that is nothing like The God of love and compassion, the One who calls us to have a heart for the lonely and the downhearted, to care for the sick and to speak up for the oppressed.

The Prophet Isaiah said:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,”  
declares the Lord.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”<sup>6</sup>

So let us be like the Psalmist who said:

Many, Lord my God,  
are the wonders you have done,  
the things you planned for us.

None can compare with you;  
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,  
they would be too many to declare.<sup>7</sup>

Let us worship God,  
who has made his light shine on us  
and who will guide our feet into the way of peace.

Let us worship The King Jesus,  
whose reign will bring shalom on the earth  
and glory to God.

Amen

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 40:5