

Address by Nigel Guthrie for Palm Sunday 2022

The events which we remember on Palm Sunday not only set the scene for Holy Week and Easter but also give us a clear insight into what Jesus was really about and indeed how he wants us to live as his followers. It is still possible to visit towns and cities in Europe and see triumphal arches which have been left by the Romans. When a victorious general returned from a battle or campaign he would ride through such an arch on fine horse or chariot as a sign of the glory and wealth which he and his forces had acquired through their conquests.

And up to a point the story of Palm Sunday reflects such events. Yet the significance of Jesus entry into Jerusalem was very different from that of a victorious general returning from war. There were certainly people in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus who would have liked him to be the leader of a popular rebellion against the Romans. And when the crowd shouted 'Hosanna to the Son of David', some of them may have had golden memories of King David in their minds - the great king who defeated the powerful enemy Goliath and helped to unite the Hebrew peoples. But Jesus didn't come into Jerusalem on a charger, or in a chariot, but on a humble ass, a beast of burden, which was associated with a king coming in peace to a city.

Jesus was entering Jerusalem as a king, but as a servant king. And when our Maundy Thursday services include the foot-washing, they remind us that Jesus came 'not to be served but to serve and to give up his life as a ransom for many'. The foot-washing which is recorded in St. John's gospel is an example of how all Christian leadership should be exercised. It should always be based in a spirit of service of others not of domination or self-importance. When priests and bishops are first ordained it is as deacons, the order which is based on a practical ministry of service. They remain deacons whatever subsequent responsibilities they are given.

And this same principle should underlie all our relationships and responsibilities. If we are entrusted with any task we should not only ask 'what can I get from this' but also 'who can I serve through doing this'. Religion has all too often been used, or rather 'abused', as a way of getting power over others. History is littered with the disasters and conflicts which that abuse has caused. But the Christian faith should always be about looking for opportunities for service, especially of those in need or distress.

The reality of Christian service can be draining or frustrating as well as joyful and rewarding. But nevertheless, it is the ideal set before us by Jesus who entered Jerusalem as a servant king. Jesus was coming to claim a throne but it was not the throne which victorious generals had in prospect. It was the throne of the cross on which his life was poured out for us all. But his throne is also a throne in the hearts of men and women who receive him into their lives. Jesus went up to Jerusalem to prepare a way for us to come to God. Let us enthrone him afresh this Holy Week as our king and resolve to serve him, and those around us as, he has served us.