

Luke 19:28-40
(Philippians 2:5-11)

Harold Wilson once famously said, 'a week is a long time in politics'. Circumstances can change rather quickly over a very short period of time. All of the recent antics in Parliament over finding a way through the Brexit process which everyone can agree on, perhaps illustrates this well.

And a week, or even less than a week, certainly seemed a long time when it came to the political and religious life of Jerusalem during that first Holy Week. Luke mentions that those lining the streets to welcome Jesus into the holy city were his 'disciples', those who had been following him, though no doubt there were others looking on inquisitively on the sidelines, perhaps with their own hopeful expectations. But one does wonder particularly about these folk who were known as Jesus' disciples. What exactly were *they* hoping to see happen when they came out in their droves to welcome the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem with great shouts of

acclamation? And where were they all by the end of the week? Perhaps some had remained near the Cross, whilst most had fled.

The thing is, as they had journeyed with him towards Jerusalem, Jesus had made it clear what was going to happen to him once he got there (that he would suffer, be killed and be raised on the third day). But their actions, when they actually welcomed him into the holy city, seemed to show that *they* had rather *different* expectations. It seems that as Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, they were perhaps still thinking of the Messiah in more popular terms. Over the previous few hundred years, a growing sense of expectation had developed amongst the Jewish people that one day, God would intervene in their situation by sending his 'anointed one', his Messiah, to come to the aid of his people. The Messiah would sit once more on the throne of David, the greatest of the kings of Israel, he would reign as king in the holy city of Jerusalem, and a new age would dawn for the Jewish people. So, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the great city of David, the people were most likely

still thinking in *these* terms, that Jesus would be a king like David - a king who would deliver his people from Roman oppression and re-establish the kingdom of Israel and the monarchy. Hence they spread out their cloaks and branches on the road, forming an improvised 'red carpet', in order to mark the arrival of someone very special – a VIP. The words which they shouted - “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” - again underlined their hope that the Messiah would set himself up as king, in the line of David.

But when we look at *Jesus'* actions more closely, we find that *his* understanding of kingship is quite different to that of the crowd who were lining the streets to greet him. Yes, Jesus does indeed present himself as the King of the Jews. But this is a king who rides into the city *not* on a horse, as some great military leader (like King David had been), but on a colt. This is a king who comes in humility and peace, quite different to the military leader, the warrior king, which most people in the crowd were

expecting.

So we have here two very different understandings of what being a king is all about: the crowd's very *earthly* understanding, and Our Lord's radically different form of kingship. Above all, *his* kingship is one that is characterized by suffering. In the well-known words of the Palm Sunday hymn - “Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp, ride on to *die*.....” In Christ we have a king who lays down his life for his people. His crown is first and foremost a crown of thorns, the *Cross* is Christ's throne, his *crucifixion* is his coronation. So when the Lord entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, the triumphal route which he travelled would *not* lead to a show of military force and might, but rather it was a route which was to lead to suffering and humiliation - a route which led ultimately to the Cross. In our reading from Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the apostle quotes from what was probably a very early Christian hymn which declares that, although Christ was equal with God, he came among us in human form in great humility, taking the form of a slave, and submitting

himself to death on a Cross.

For the so-called 'disciples' who welcomed the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem, such an understanding of the Messiah was perhaps far from their minds. How many of them actually stayed with Jesus by the end of the week – journeying with him all the way to the Cross? – perhaps only a few. By contrast, may it be *our* desire to be true and faithful followers of the *real* Jesus, seeking to rediscover afresh what it really means to take up *our* Cross and follow him. In fact, I would very much encourage you to come to worship during this Holy Week, because it so powerfully reminds us that just as Our Lord himself had to pass through suffering and death before he could enter into his glory, so it must be with *us* if *we* sincerely want to follow him.

Because Jesus died, he was raised, he was exalted to the place of all authority in the universe, and at *his* Name every knee must bow...

O what a mystery, meekness and majesty;
Bow down and worship, for this is your God.