



Sunday Reflection

Season of Lent

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 28 March 2021

Palm Sunday

On Palm Sunday we hold our palm crosses and gather to echo the praise of the crowds when Jesus entered Jerusalem. But we also enter this Holy Week with him, and look towards another cross and beyond it to the triumph of his resurrection.
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"** Mark 11:10

An Illustration to set the scene

In the summer of 1970 a young British rock band was seeking a new name.

That year marked the centenary of the death of Charles Dickens, and the surrounding publicity gave them inspiration. But rather than opt for a hero's name, they settled on a very unlikely Dickens character.

So the band that had performed under various names finally became Uriah Heep, and, along with Led Zeppelin and others, helped to establish British heavy metal music. As the Dickens villain famously claimed to be "very 'umble", they called their debut album **"Very 'Eavy..Very 'Umble"**.

Humble name or not, that album launched a career of over fifty years, with adoring fans flocking to their concerts throughout the world, just as crowds greeted Jesus on his entry into Jerusalem.

In *David Copperfield*, of course, the character named **Uriah Heep** only appears to be humble, pretending to be a self-effacing servant. Behind the scenes, he was plotting the downfall of his employer.

Jesus was neither villain nor fraud, but he too was not quite what he seemed to observers.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's *Liturgy of the Palms*, at the start of our service, the Gospel reading from Mark differs in some respects from other evangelists' accounts, not least because the "leafy branches" aren't specified as the palms which give today its name. Also, we're told the animal on which Jesus rode was a colt, a word we normally associate with a young horse. However, the original Greek word can mean a young donkey, as clarified in the other accounts and preserved in traditional hymns and Palm Sunday processions.

To us, it seems clear that Jesus was indeed being humble, riding on a donkey. Scholars have commented, though, that kings returning from victory and entering a city in peace did ride donkeys. Horses were reserved for riding into war. Onlookers would have known that. Jesus was certainly greeted as a king by the fickle crowds who would soon turn against him – just as some fans of the rock band deserted them as their style of music began to change.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowds around him shouted: "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Whether derived from Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek, the word "hosanna" is a plea to be saved as well as a term of respect. At the time, many were anticipating a messiah, a royal Son of David anointed by God to restore Israel's fortunes. But despite how it seemed to them, Jesus was not the sort of king the people of Jerusalem were expecting. He truly was humble!

Did they turn from him when it became clear he would not be riding into battle against the occupying Romans and thus save Israel from humiliation?

Was he not what he seemed, after all?

The answer can be found in the beautiful hymn that Paul quotes in his letter to the Philippians. Jesus was not an earthly king, but very God in human form, who "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." Such humility was to lead to the apparent humiliation of Good Friday. But it would also lead to a far greater victory than one over the Romans – our Saviour's victory over sin and death that we will celebrate next Sunday.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

If we seek to follow Jesus, can we try to emulate in some way the true humility he showed? Being humble is not grovelling like the Dickens character Uriah Heep, or choosing his less-than-heroic name for a rock band. In the familiar definition (often incorrectly attributed to C. S. Lewis), "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."

Rather than save himself from excruciating pain, Jesus sacrificed himself for us. Can we think of ourselves less, put the needs of others on at least an equal footing with our own, and thus love our neighbours as ourselves?

Can we avoid humiliating others by insulting them as Jesus was insulted, or discriminating against them?

And most importantly of all, can we not judge people by their appearance?

Like the superficially "humble" villain in David Copperfield, and like the apparent humiliation of Jesus on the cross, things are not always what they seem.

"Some Greeks... came to Philip... and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'" John 12:20-21

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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