

Sunday School 28 March 2021: The king is coming (John 12:12-19)

To the horror of the religious leaders, the people were so impressed when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, that they decided that he must be the Messiah – the promised King of Israel. And they were right.

Well almost! Jesus was the Messiah but he was not the earthly king that they thought he must be. Over the years they had been taught by the teachers of the law and the Pharisees that the Messiah, God's special servant, would come to bring them freedom. Because Israel had been conquered by Rome, they thought this meant that Messiah would chase the Romans out. If the religious leaders had read the Scriptures more carefully, they would have realised that the Messiah was going to be a suffering leader not a military conqueror and that the 'freedom' he would bring would be freedom from God's judgement

So Jesus planned to ride into the city like a conqueror to show them that he was indeed the Messiah.

Well almost! Jesus was showing them that he was God's servant not a conquering king. He turned everything about a usual victory procession upside down! Hundreds of years earlier the prophet Zechariah had painted a word picture of the Messiah riding into the city (Zech 9:9) and in Jesus this prophecy come true.

A CONQUERING KING	JESUS
Proud –in charge	Humble - under God's orders
Riding a war horse – a stallion	Riding a young donkey
Handcuffed POWs marched alongside	Joyful 'fans' danced before him
Triumphal arch would be erected	A lonely cross awaited him
Promotion ahead	Death
Victory already won	Victory still had to be won

The people echoed the words the psalmist had written hundreds of years earlier: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps 118:26). They waved palm branches around – a sign that they didn't understand because palm branches were like a secret code for 'Make Israel Great Again'. They were not wrong to celebrate, but they were wrong to think he was there in power to make the nation great. He was there to show them God's greatness.

Even the disciples seem to have got it wrong and thought this might be the beginning of Jesus reign. They probably couldn't understand why he didn't ride up to the Roman garrison and overpower them with the help of armies of angels. Jesus could have done so, but that wasn't God's way – if Jesus had done that he would have sinned. Instead he was about to suffer terribly as our King.

The chief priests were terrified by this parade. They thought that the people were rioting or protesting and that they would crown Jesus as king. John tells us the priests said "See the world has gone after him!" (John 12:19). If Jesus overthrew the Romans, they would lose their power as friends of Rome! So they were delighted when one of Jesus' own disciples came to them with a proposal. Judas was so disgusted (we think) by Jesus' refusal to take over powerfully that he offered to betray Jesus to them in return for 30 pieces of silver.

And so, that ride led not to earthly greatness, but to heavenly glory – via the suffering of the cross. Jesus is now seated at God’s side in heaven; he is the King of the whole world – not just Israel! But he claimed his throne through suffering. He knew that this was the only way to beat evil.

Like Jesus we aren’t likely to become powerful people, or even the most fortunate people on earth. In fact Jesus warns us that we must be prepared to suffer for him. We may not be like some Christians who have lost their homes or their jobs or even their lives. But there will be times when we have to refuse to do things which we would like to do; there will be times when we have to accept that people will tease us about being Christians, there will be times when we have to make decisions others think are silly. Suffering doesn’t earn us God’s love, but it shows that we understand what kind of king Jesus really is.

Easter readings

Monday: Matthew 21:1-9	Riding into Jerusalem
Tuesday: Matthew 26:14-16, 27:3-6	Judas’ plans go wrong
Wednesday: John 13: 3, 12-17	Jesus washes his disciples’ feet
Thursday: 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26	Paul explains about Jesus’ last supper with his disciples
Friday: Matthew 26: 47-56	Jesus is arrested
Saturday: Matthew 27: 27-37	Crucifixion
Sunday: Matthew 28:1-10	Christ is risen!