

LUKE 19:28-40  
JESUS IS KING!

Let's talk about kings and queens! There would be two conversations: the first conversation would be about kings and their power and how they have abused that power or been thirsty for more; kings have taken their armies to war because that thirst for power has led them to invade their neighbours and try to overwhelm them, all to have a bigger kingdom. History is full of that kind of king, bloodthirsty at worst, at very least greedy and corrupt, all in the name of becoming more and more powerful! This is the kind of king that nowadays we shy away from or are embarrassed to have in our history, but at the time, these kings were the centre of power, and people curried their favour; their courts were the places people wanted to be and power was something to have and to take more and more.

The second conversation would be about kings as mere figureheads, kings who have devolved decision-making power to elected governments, a constitutional monarchy, but without the power to make these decisions themselves. Royalty has pomp and ceremony, but no power; kings and queens might have lots of influence, but no real power to do anything. Our Queen falls into that category as do lots of royal families today; their kingship is nothing to do with absolute power and any power they do have is about influence and example. Palm Sunday tells us that Jesus is king: does He fall into either of these two conversations, to be a king who is power-thirsty; or to be a king who has no power to do anything?

*"Your kingdom come!"* We prayed these words this morning. What do we mean by them? What do we think when we pray these words? When we say these words, we are praying for God's kingdom to come, to be established in the world, to grow in the world. What do we expect? What do we want God to be or to do as we pray for His kingdom to come? Is Jesus a king who is power-hungry, ready to overwhelm His people by that power, ready to squash us down, to make us conform by force to His ways and to His will? There was a time when it might have seemed as if the Christians' God was like that, at the times of the Crusades! Or is Jesus powerless, decision-making is devolved and He has no power and authority and we are free to make our own choices in life? The answer is somewhere in between!

I have had privilege in last few weeks of conducting services where new ministers have been inducted. First of all in Blackhall and then in Davidsons Mains, I have had the privilege of inducting these new ministers. As part of that service, there is a brilliant declaration of what the Church of Scotland is and where our foundations lie in the gospel and in the grace of God. At two points in the service, we read these words: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church..." What we do on these occasions is done understanding and knowing and declaring that Jesus is the King and head of His church; the church does these things knowing that Jesus has authority over us; He is the church's king. It is a great statement and it is so important to repeat it at that crucial stage in the life of a congregation and its new minister; together we stand with Jesus as King.

Jesus as king is the whole focus of Palm Sunday. It is what Palm Sunday is all about. Jesus is King! He has travelled towards Jerusalem and now it seems as if He deliberately declares Himself king in this rather strange way. He sends His disciples to find the donkey; is *"the Lord..."* (Luke 19:34) a prearranged password? He travels into the city sitting on the donkey, at the head of a procession, maybe not a big procession, but a procession that the Jewish leaders and others couldn't miss! The crowd is full of enthusiasm: they are singing Psalm 118 as part of that procession, *Hosanna*, *"Blessed is..."* (Luke 19:38) and they are putting their coats on the road

and waving palm branches, and all of this is saying to Jerusalem, Jesus is King! The leaders got it; so they told Jesus to have His disciples be quiet; they didn't want that message to be heard by the Romans; that would lead to a clamp-down! But Jesus will be heard and the city will see that Jesus is King!

We see Jesus as king through the eyes of Zechariah. He had been a prophet 500 years before, at the time when the city was being rebuilt. Zechariah had vision of a king who would come to Jerusalem, a new king who would come to rule in the city. It was a very particular vision of a king; none of our conversations at the start would fit this king. "*Rejoice...*" (*Zechariah 9:9*) He is a king with qualities: He will know what is right and He will do what is right; He will be gentle – witness Him riding on a donkey rather than a great war-horse; He will proclaim peace to the nations rather than try to invade and overwhelm His enemies; He will bring salvation to His people and indeed to all nations. This is the kind of king Jesus is! He is quite different from the conversation we had at the start about kings and queens. It seems as if Jesus deliberately completed Zechariah's vision, that He chose to act it out for Jerusalem to see. Here is their king and there were people who welcomed Him gladly. Jesus, the King who loves His people and who by the end of the week will have died for His people and the only crown He ever wore was a crown of thorns!

You won't find Jesus' kingdom on any map. Jesus is King in the hearts and minds of His people. The basic Christian confession since the start has been "JC is Lord" – the same thing. His is not a political kingdom, but Jesus is to rule in the hearts and minds of His people. His is a spiritual kingdom, but with consequences for every part of our lives and the life of world in which we live. What we believe as Christians is shaped by what Jesus teaches and what Jesus has done; we don't really have the freedom to believe whatever we like about God and the world; when Jesus is King then what we believe is shaped by Jesus. The way in which we live is the same: our attitudes to all sorts of things - money, work, family - are shaped by Jesus. Church life is not ours to do with as we please, but is to be shaped by Jesus as King. This is what it means to declare that Jesus is King and head of His Church; we are His people, committed to do His will! We are not forced into submission by an overbearing King, but we are loved into obedience by a King who is gentle and who has saved us when He died on the cross.

There is a sadness in this story and Luke's version is the only place where we see this sadness. If we read on in Luke 19 we are able to listen in to Jesus as He looks at the city. "*As He...*" (*Luke 19:41ff*) He sees something at the heart of the city and it causes Him distress. Oh, there is a crowd full of enthusiasm, singing, waving, but there is a sadness in Jesus because of what else He sees; perhaps He also recognises that some of that enthusiasm is temporary and will be gone by Friday! "If only..." - could ever two words convey more sense of regret than these two words; "if only..." they had really seen what was going on here, but they didn't and soon the opportunity would be gone; if only they had recognised that God was in this, but they didn't see and soon the opportunity would be gone. On Friday, there would be another cry about kings: "*we have no king but Caesar!*" (*John 19:15*) They didn't see; they didn't recognise and Jesus was sad and they missed out on the blessing of God and salvation because they wouldn't see what God was doing and who Jesus was.

For some, that was because Jesus was a threat: the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus because he challenged their power and authority; they loved the thought that they could order people's lives by telling them what to do and Jesus challenged that; they wanted rid of Him. For some, it was because of prejudice: Jesus came from the wrong place, from Nazareth, Galilee - prophets don't come from Galilee; why would someone from there even claim to be God-sent? For some, it might have been

apathy - we don't really care; we simply want to get on with the business of making a living, making money, providing for our families, For whatever reason, people rejected Jesus, ignored Him and so didn't see what God was doing in their midst. Jesus was sad! Jesus wept over a city that would not see! We live in a city and a nation that is much the same: 2% of the city population at most will be in Church this morning; the statistics for Scotland as a whole are not much different; we have a city and a nation that, for a whole lot of reasons, don't see that Jesus is Lord. Paul reminds us in Romans 10 that Jesus is Lord and he reminds us that we have a responsibility to tell people that Jesus is Lord; "*how can...*" (Romans 10:14f) We're telling people something about Easter by these cards going out today; pray that something said there will strike a chord with someone; it might be the time for someone when faith in Jesus begins.

In a few moments we're going to sing the hymn *Take my life, Lord, let it be*. It is quite a simple hymn, but its impact is profound. The hymn is all about what it means for us to say that Jesus is King. It asks us to give ourselves to serve Jesus in every aspect of our lives: our hands to serve Jesus and reflect His love to the world; our feet to run telling the good news of Jesus to others; our voice, singing His praise; our intellect, shaping the ways in which we think by the notion of Jesus as King; our will, seeking to do God's will rather than to assert our ego; our hearts and our love, what makes us the people we are, our passions in life - these too are to have Jesus at the centre. If we'd been singing this hymn 50 years ago, we'd also have been asked to give "our silver and our gold; not a mite would I withhold" but for some reason that line is not in the hymn book any more! When you sing these words, think about what you're singing; think about what you're promising to Jesus; this is about Jesus being king. When Jesus is king of our lives, then that will overflow into the world in which we live; we will want to change the world to reflect Jesus' ways and Jesus' priorities; we will want to make the world a better place for everyone, even those who are poor, to make it a fairer place.

Palm Sunday: the start of a week that shapes so much of Christian faith and life; the start of a week that ends with Easter. It begins with Jesus riding into the city on a donkey, telling the city, telling the world that He is King! Ever since, people have been in two minds about Jesus: what kind of king is He? Is He really a King? Do I want Him to be King of my life? That last question is one only you can resolve for yourself. Let me simply show you Jesus, King, "*righteous and having salvation gentle, riding on donkey... proclaiming peace*" (Zechariah 9:9f) He is a king who loves us, who draws us to Himself by that love. There is no better way to live than to have Jesus as your king!