

Mark 11.1-11

Often it is in the years after an event
that we realise just how significant it was.
A son asks if he can bring yet another girlfriend to dinner
and it doesn't seem a particularly significant event.
Five years later, we know her as our sons' wife,
the mother of our first grandchild
and we look back to that first encounter with Sarah
as a particularly significant moment.

The arrival at Jerusalem must have seemed to mark
a particular moment in the disciples life with Jesus.
They were coming to the capital city.
They were entering the heart of Jewish nation
and the national religion.
Yet, the full significance of that day was only understood
in the years beyond the death and resurrection of Jesus.
It was seen as defining moment.
The moment when Jesus accepted
that he was coming to his people as their "King"
and when the crowds cheered him on his way
with the royal cry:

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!"

John and Luke both give the impression
of the whole crowd being totally focussed on Jesus
and acclaiming him as king.
In Mark's Gospel we also have the pilgrims
coming from Galilee and Judea for a great festival.
What isn't clear is whether the whole crowd greet him
or whether it's the disciples who shout and sing his praises.
The other pilgrims may well have been in nationalistic mood.
Their shouts of "***Hosanna***" literally mean "***save now***"
and could be understood as an appeal to God
to save their nation from Roman rule!
"The coming kingdom of our ancestor, David"
could also be seen as a cry for freedom from foreign rule
and the re-establishment of Israel as an independent nation.

One interesting question is why Mark gives us such detail
about how the donkey was procured.
The suggestion has been made, and it seems likely,
that the what Jesus is doing is using the right of a king
to impress, demand immediately, the animals he needs.
For Mark, this may well be as much a sign
that Jesus has the authority of king,
as the actual riding into Jerusalem.
(We note, however, that the promise is made
that the donkey will be returned "immediately".)

Riding into Jerusalem was highly unusual.
The donkey was what king's rode when they came in peace.
By contrast, the horse was the animal of war!

So Jesus comes to his own people.
He comes as a king but he comes in peace.
He comes not to overthrow Pilate
but to establish a kingdom in the hearts of women and men.
What we shall see over the next few weeks
is the way that the Jewish and Roman establishment
try and work out what to do with this man
who threatens them, not by force,
but by a power that they do not understand.....

For us, there are always two sides to our relationship with Jesus.
On the one hand we recognise that he has authority over us.
We are committed to serving him
in the whole of our lives.
We may give him high sounding titles:
"King of kings and Lord of lords."
We believe that Jesus comes as the agent of God, the Son of God,
to reveal the way that leads to life in all its fullness.

Yet, we also know him as carpenter,
friend of Zacchaeus and blind Bartimaeus,
of tax collectors and sinners.
He is the one to whom we can speak quite simply in our prayers
with no reserve, no holding back.
He never looks down on us,
is never superior,
but is full of understanding and generous loving kindness.

In our communion today we meet with our Lord, our King,
but he is also the crucified friend of humanity
who gives his life for us all.
He gives his life for us
that we may know the love and the friendship
that is at the heart of the universe
and reflect that love and friendship in our own lives. Amen.