

Palm Sunday

King David was anointed while very young, before serving Saul as a harpist, before defeating Goliath, and long before Saul, in his jealous rage, had his army pursue David to kill him. David was anointed as the king of Israel, but he was also anointed with the Holy Spirit at this time — all the divine commendation you would think he could want to go and take the throne of Israel by force. But did he? No. He had several opportunities to take Saul's life but spurned each. He would not *seize* power, and that made him the better king — he had a respect for the current king, and for the office of monarch, and though his was a life of constant fighting, it was never against Saul.

Once David *was* made king, God made him a promise: that one of his descendants would rule on the throne forever. The title 'Son of David' thus became a phrase loaded with meaning. It meant not merely *a* descendant of David, but *that* descendant, the one who would reign on the throne forever. This 'Son of David', when he came, would have to embody all that David represented, and even more — he needed to be even greater than David to warrant holding the throne forever, wouldn't he?

On Palm Sunday, as Jesus entered Jerusalem the crowds lay down their cloaks and palm branches and cried out 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'

These are not words spoken lightly. They express a great deal of hope and significance. If Jesus is king, it must be a kingship both like David, and unlike David. Like David in the strength and charisma of his leadership, like David in his unwillingness to wrest a crown from the head of another king. Unlike David in nature of his leadership, unlike in his incorruptible goodness, unlike because of the nature of the salvation he brought.

I have said that Jesus was anointed. There were three offices that received anointing — prophet, priest and king. Jesus uniquely fulfilled all three roles.

Jesus was a prophet. Prophets were those anointed by God to act as messengers to the people. They carried the word of God. Moses the prophet led his people in God's great rescue from slavery, but he also gave them God's word through receiving the law: God's code for how he wanted his people to live. Later prophets spoke on God's behalf, typically by drawing the attention of kings and people back to the law, or by helping them understand God's will properly, thus enabling them to know God better. Jesus did not merely tell God's word, he *was* the word of God, the ultimate message of God. Through him we got to know God's character completely, because he was God. He redirected our faith towards a more grace-filled, open-hearted, positively loving expression. Through him we have seen the Father. And this 'communication' of God is vital for our salvation.

Jesus is a priest. Not as a Levite, like Moses, but a priest nonetheless — an intermediary between man and God, uniquely capable as he was both fully man and fully God. He was the priest and the sacrifice, he was the shepherd and the lamb. He shared with us God's grace, while standing in our place. He prayed for us, helped us pray, and heard our prayers. Through him we received the Holy Spirit, that we might have God with us always. His mediation, in his life, death and resurrection are vital for our salvation.

Jesus is king. Kings exercise their power and authority not for their own profit, but for the good of their people. They determine the laws by which we live, and should model the living of those laws. Kings of old would protect their countries by leading their armies into battle.

The greatest leaders belonged to their people, so that the people belonged to them. They ruled the hearts of their people even more than they ruled their lives. Jesus did all this. Though invested with all of God's power and authority, Jesus did not use it for his own gain, but only for his people. The miracles he performed were signs of his heavenly kingdom breaking through into this world. He led us into battle against our enemy — not an earthly enemy, but sin and death — and conquered. He became the pattern for our Christian life, ruling our hearts. 'Salvation' won through the cross is worth nothing, if we are not then changed to be like Christ in our lives. His kingship is vital for our salvation.

Jesus was anointed — prophet, priest and king. Each aspect of who he was essential for our faith, our grace and living a new life in him.

The crowd of Palm Sunday hit upon a truth they did not fully understand, before too quickly turning on Jesus and calling for his death on Good Friday. In this quick turnaround, who failed? Did Jesus fail to keep up to expectations? Only inasmuch as he wasn't a slave to populism; only inasmuch as the crowd of Jerusalem had all too human expectations, to which he would not descend. Having acclaimed him as the son of David on the Sunday they did not trust him to rule on Friday.

Jesus, however, was never after the power or the popularity. He did not need to do well in the polls. He would save his people despite their rejection of him.

As we enter Holy Week, we find ourselves reflecting on Jesus's perfect love for us; that he cared to save us; that he would speak the truth to the High Priest, to Herod and to Pilate. That he would not get angry at the people who claimed to worship God but failed to recognise him. That he spoke kindness to John and to Mary on the cross. That he welcomed the criminal on the cross beside him into paradise. That in his resurrection he only spoke of peace and love, and not judgement. At the same time as we reflect on his goodness, we think about how unwarranted it is — how undeserving so many of us are — and how very necessary his love has been. The world could not find peace without him, could not know goodness without him, could not know the fullest extent of love without him.

This is what draws us back again and again to wonder, worship and pray — that Jesus should be our prophet, priest and king — acclaimed as son of David on Palm Sunday, but acclaimed by the Father as King of Kings and prince of peace on Easter Day. I wish you all a reflective, prayerful and ultimately joyful Holy Week.

Amen.