

# ***The King is Coming***

## ***Sixth Sunday in Lent A (Palm Sunday)***

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# **Sunday, April 2, 2023**

It was a warm autumn day, with little wind and the sun starting to thin as it does in autumn, and the crowds gathered beside the road. There was a continual buzz of excitement in the crowd as we approached the appointed hour. And we waited and watched and socialised and chatted as the time passed. There were people of all ages, from babies in pushchairs to elderly ladies in wheelchairs and school children with flags. People from all walks of life, all ages and sizes and all there because we knew something would happen. We all knew that something important would happen and that we would be part of it.

And it did. The car pulled up, and she got out and moved down between the crowd – taking flowers and smiling and engaging first one and then another. And then it was over. But we all knew that we had witnessed history happening.

These are some thoughts from the visit of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip near where we lived in Tasmania. It is a real window into the events we celebrate on this day. This was an occasion, and perhaps the only popular acclamation of Jesus as a leader – for it was the same crowd that would scream crucify him five days later. And I don't think that these people were ingenuine in either response. Whether royalist or republican, all welcomed the Queen with fervour, for it was the nature of the occasion. The popular acclamation of Jesus did not mean that he was a leader that they would necessarily follow but that he was a person of whom they should take note.

And to the enemies of Jesus, this was just the last straw and precipitated the events that would overtake the world in the subsequent days.

Well, everyone loves a parade, and this entry of Jesus into Jerusalem continues to be celebrated as a historical event and a preview of what is to come. Scripture shows us we can look forward to Jesus arriving in Jerusalem as King. This will be the beginning of the new age of the Kingdom. So it is essential that this day, we not only look back but also look forward to the end times.

But what about us here on Yorke? How do we relate to this? How do we engage the story?

There is a tendency for us to place ourselves in the story in the crowd. The crowd is a comfortable place to be. It is easy to gather the crowd. Curiosity or the expectation of something happening will always draw them in. People want to know and be part of it but avoid committing. It is almost as if belonging to the crowd is the most important thing. We may look on and even cheer, but our commitment is to the crowd, not the person we watch. We will commit ourselves to the crowd rather than to the cause. The monarchist would be foolish to see the success of the Royal visit as an indication of the support for their cause.

As a church, we have been the crowd at times. One of my colleagues remarked in a recent letter that, for the most part, the church enjoys the favour of country people except when they try to close their churches. (Although this is changing.) But support is one thing – commitment is another. Only if the crowds were prepared to tread the disciples' path

would Jesus have been satisfied. Even the crowds could be replaced by these very stones if necessary.

The question that you and I must ask ourselves is, Have we committed to sticking? The privilege of observing the resurrection was given to the disciples, not the crowd. The crowd did its own thing and, in doing so, missed out. It was the women who received the privilege of first knowing about the resurrection who had stayed by the cross. Peter and John followed to the trial next. The reward of perseverance will reveal to us the risen Lord, not the following of the crowd.

There is a great danger for the church of our times – for popularism is rife. Our literature praises the great churches, the mega-churches and the small churches are dismissed as ineffective or inefficient. We are in danger of viewing bottoms on seats; bottom lines are more important than spirituality or community. We have fallen for the lie that the majority is always right and that we cannot be correct unless we are the majority.

This week, as we move towards the cross and the empty tomb, I would like us to forget the crowd. I would like each of you to forget, even your brothers and sisters in Christ. I would like each of you to journey through this next week with no companion other than Jesus. You may or may not choose to engage in services with us during the week, but we will focus on personal spirituality on a personal journey of faith.

This is not just for those new in the faith but for all of us, you and I, to renew our faith, experience it anew, and discover within ourselves new resources of faith.

And I would like us to begin today. The first part of the journey is preparation. Many of us carry with us baggage from the past. You and I have hurts, sorrows, or regrets that belong to the past and should be left in the past, but we find ourselves hanging onto them. Baggage that will slow us down or even prevent us from reaching the journey's end.

I don't expect to solve these things instantly, but our first step is to identify them and ask God to bring forgiveness into our circumstances. Towards the end of this week, the symbol of the Cross stands for God's great act of reconciliation and forgiveness. As we journey to the foot of the Cross, each of us can lay our burdens down there and make a fresh start.

I want to commence this process this morning. It is to begin by asking God to get involved. For some, we have tended to hold God off at arm's length, but the message of the Cross is that he wants to get involved.

Take a moment now to identify one burden you are carrying – a hurt from a person, situation, or group – even something that makes you angry with God. Let us then offer these things for God to deal with during this most holy week.

**AMEN**