

24th March 2024 – Palm Sunday

John 12:12-19

What a King?

Sometimes, it's all about how you look at it. I don't often talk in public about my fishing exploits, mainly because I don't have much to brag about, but every so often even I catch a fish the size of which is worth talking about (*picture of fish only on screen*). When you see this picture, what do you think? Do you think, 'wow, well done, that looks like a good one!?' Or do you think, 'mmm, what else is going on here'? Or perhaps, some of you jump a bit further ahead, and think, 'without any context, nothing to measure it up against, I have no idea how big that fish actually is!?' So, if I add this to the view (*picture of same fish with the lure it was caught on, which is over double its size*), does that change it for you? Completely different now, isn't it? You can see now that the talking point about this fish isn't how big it is, but how small, and for me I have to wonder at what he was thinking trying to eat a lure which is over twice his size! Looking wider, looking at the whole picture, gives us a different perspective and understanding of what we are seeing.

That theme of different people having different views of the same scene or event, depending on how much we see of the bigger picture, is one we bring up regularly when we look at Palm Sunday. Because that is what happens there; many different people and groups of people in the crowd, and many different views and reactions coming from them. Have a read of it in our reading, or look up a picture of it. We see friends of Jesus, like His disciples, and others who know Him. We know that there are those there who are His enemies, like the Pharisees. We hear from them in John's version here; they are still looking for a way to have Jesus killed, to get Him out of the way, and they are worried that this sudden surge in Jesus' popularity would make that harder for them. They must have forgotten just how fickle the support of a crowd can be. And then, no doubt, many in that crowd were just curious; either they had heard some stories about this miracle worker and teacher and wanted to

get a closer look, or they heard the sound and excitement of the parade and came to have a look, and then got caught up with the crowd so they too yelled out, 'God bless the King of Israel!' A King is coming, but depending on what we see, what we want to see, what we believe, what kind of a king is He?

What do all those people see here? What do we see when we look at this story?

We have the advantage of a different perspective or viewpoint to what they were given. For us, we know that Jesus' entry is the beginning of what we call Holy Week, with Jesus dying on the cross on Good Friday, and rising from the dead just one week after this on Easter Sunday. In between that we know that His enemies plotted against Him, His friends betrayed, denied, and abandoned Him, He was falsely accused and convicted, beaten, and then hung on a cross to die for the sins of all people, just as God had been promising would happen for so long. And, as our Saviour, and to the surprise of even those whom He had been telling for so long that this is what would happen, He rose again, as the King and Saviour God had intended Him to be. What kind of a king? A King of forgiveness and love for all people.

We can see the kind of King Jesus is because of the picture we can look back on. One of the middle verses of this reading explains this for us really well: 'At first, Jesus' disciples did not understand. But after he had been given his glory, they remembered all this. Everything had happened exactly as the Scriptures said it would.' (v. 16) We have that view, looking back. From the empty tomb on Easter Sunday morning we can now look back on everything which has happened. And it's because of this that we can now see Jesus as the kind of King who He really is; the servant King, who has come for us all.

This week I listened to an interesting podcast of an interview with an engineer, Kelly Weinersmith, who, along with her husband, has just written a book about if it is possible, and what it would take, to send large groups of people to live on the moon or Mars. The interviewer pointed out to her that many astronauts, while they are orbiting the earth and looking at it from afar, make the

comment of how beautiful and peaceful and precious the earth seems to them, and they vow to be better people when they return to home. So, the interviewer asked, if more people go into space and have this view looking back at earth, can we expect humankind as a whole to be kinder and more loving to one another.

In response to this question, the author used a term, 'the overview effect', which is how when we are looking at something in one way we can have one set of feelings and intentions, but that those feelings and intentions can be completely different when our view changes. Many of those astronauts who said those lovely quotes, she said, when they came back to earth still ended up doing things like cheating on their wives, and not always being nice people. In the same way, she argues, she has heard many people when they become parents say the experience changes their attitude and outlook towards others, whereas, in reality, as time goes on and the initial joy and glow of that new birth fades, they go back to being as they were.

The overview effect. I like it, and I can really relate to it. We can, I think, apply this to the way our views and attitudes change according to what we are seeing and feeling at the time to many parts of our lives, including our faith. It is also this shift in views and therefore attitudes and actions which we see happening here on Palm Sunday. So many people here were welcoming Jesus as King when He comes into Jerusalem, that the Pharisees were worried about how they would have Him arrested that week. And yet just five days later, on Good Friday, probably many of those who were here shouting, 'Hail to the King of Israel!', are now joining with another crowd in shouting, 'Crucify Him!'. Change the view, change the crowd; change the attitude and the actions.

Does this happen with our faith at all? I don't know about for you, but for me I can say that it does. We can witness a baptism in our congregation, and remember how in our baptism God has joined us to His love in a way He will never break, but then, when times get hard, when we struggle with any aspect of our lives, or we just have other things luring us away, we can forget what that means for us, and the comfort and strength we get from it. We can come and receive the body and

blood in Jesus in Holy Communion, and the forgiveness and strength that offers us, but then allow our guilt and struggles in faith to still sometimes get us down. We can come to a worship service which lifts us up, read a Bible reading which really inspires us, find strength and support with other Christians, but then still feel like we are struggling alone when things get hard and go against us.

Like the people in the crowd on Palm Sunday, the overview effect can quickly change the way we see and react to the King who has come for us. For our overview, for us to have a proper perspective, we can see Him in the context of His whole story; from the prophecies at the beginning of the Old Testament, through His birth, life, death, and resurrection, to His rising into heaven where He now lives as our true King. And what kind of a King? As we look at the big picture, we see Him as a King who is loving, serving, caring, forgiving. A King for all. A King full of compassion and love. And King who has done all He can to open the way for us to come back to God.

What a King? It is still a question, but when we know Jesus as our King, we can also make it an exclamation. In whatever we are going through, in however we are looking at Him, our view and our response doesn't need to change; Jesus is the King who has come to be our Saviour, our friend, to give us love and strength, each day in whatever we go through. As we now get ready to remember and celebrate what He did for us at Easter, we can worship and serve this King in our lives. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- Have you ever had the experience of being caught up in the mood of a crowd, perhaps at a sporting game when you loudly barracked for a team you don't normally like?
- Try to imagine that you were in the crowd on that Palm Sunday and didn't really know anything about Jesus. What do you think your view would have been?
- How do you view Jesus as your King and Saviour? Is your view always the same, or does it change depending on what you are going through, how you are feeling?
- What does it mean that Jesus came as King: for you? For the world?

Pray: thank God that Jesus came to be the King of all people, and to be our Saviour. Ask God to help us to make Him the King of our lives also.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
24.03.24*