

What was wrong with the crowds when they saw Jesus coming into Jerusalem? Couldn't they see that something wasn't right? How full of yourself do you have to be, how much do you have to believe in your own dreams and wishes, for them not to see that God was doing things differently to what they wanted and expected?

Were the crowds, like 21st century people, into wish fulfilment? Did they think, like so many of us now 'Whatever I want things to be, that's how they will be... I am in control of my life and no one and nothing can take that control away from me.'

Surely the signs that the crowd greeting Jesus was weak and deluded were there from the start of Jesus' entry into the city? Their expectation, their desire was for Jerusalem and Israel to be freed from bondage to another nation, freed to be the light to the nations God intended them to be by a mighty Messiah. They pictured God liberating them from Roman domination in the same way as God had liberated the Israelites from Egypt with might and wonder – including parting the Red Sea to let their forbears escape.

So, why did they go wild when Jesus came into Jerusalem not, like other conquering heroes, on a powerful horse – but on a donkey – accompanied, in Matthew's account of the event – by an even greater symbol of weakness and vulnerability, the foal of the donkey too?

It seems to be a classic case of mind over matter. What people want to believe, they will believe, even if the facts and the evidence before them point to things being the opposite of what they expect and want. 'We all make mistakes.' 'We are all weak and vulnerable.' The Jerusalem crowd are caught in a trap of wish-fulfilment.

So, how does Jesus, the Son of God, react? Does he get off his donkey and check things out with the crowd? Does he say 'Do you understand? God is not coming with the power and might that you want and expect. God is not going to lead Israel to liberation through physical force. God is - in this moment – doing things totally differently to your dreams and pre-conceptions'.

No, he doesn't. He ploughs on, regardless. He accepts and runs with the mis-guided acclamations, the mis-directed shouts of praise of the crowd. He knows that the same people, including those who have followed him and his teaching closely for some years, will continue to make mistakes and get things even more wrong as the days progress and as he makes his lonely, isolated way to crucifixion in five days time.

This is the miracle of Holy Week and Easter. This is the mystery of God's grace offered both to vulnerable and mistaken people in Jesus' day and to us in our own day.

We all get it wrong. We always get it wrong. We want to be in control of our lives. We think we are in control of our lives. But we aren't.

There are other forces at work. There are other forces in play. And these 'other forces' are ...the powers of God: powers which are totally different to and subvert our expectations of what power is about and what power looks like. Divine power is love. Divine power is mercy. Divine power is putting the other – particularly the weak, the defenceless and the vulnerable – first.

Divine power is bringing life out of death. Divine power is, like Jesus, going through death in order then to reveal and share new life.

So, as we battle the forces of Covid 19, as we find our world turned upside down and look for salvation through both managing the spread of the virus effectively and waiting for an effective vaccine, we are weak and vulnerable. But know this, from Palm Sunday onwards: God knows, accepts and works with our vulnerability. God knows, accepts and works with our perpetual propensity to get things wrong. God knows, accepts and works with our waywardness and sinful self-regard.

And the way God responds is to reveal and demonstrate his power through the power of vulnerability itself, evoking and calling out from us expressions of love, mercy and compassion. This demonstration is going on – and we are participating in it – even, for instance, as the needs of the most at risk and the most vulnerable are met during this Covid 19 crisis.

Christ's crucifixion and Christ's resurrection continue to this day. In Christ's resurrection – which we **will** celebrate on Easter Day – the light has already overcome the darkness. Our task is to join with the Holy Spirit in taking the light which has already come and shedding and sharing that light into whichever corner of the world – including our own hearts and minds – where that darkness remains.

This Palm Sunday let us rejoice that God meets, accepts and loves us as we are, in our wrong-headedness and waywardness. Let us pray that we might look for and share with others the new life of God revealed in the Risen Christ throughout this week – and especially in seven days time, on Easter Day.

Amen.

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