

Date: April 13, 2025 (Palm Sunday)

Texts: Psalm 118. 1-2, 19-29 / Phil. 2. 5-11

Title: "The Servant King"

### Intro -

breaking with the Liturgical Calendar (a churchy term for the church calendar...)

we introduced Palm Sunday last week with a "Children's Pageant"

- a great time... lots of energy and excitement...

not unlike that first Palm Sunday - when Jesus rode into Jerusalem

as a king... and the people celebrated and rejoiced...

and they sand out with their "Hosannas"

cf. - we know this story (especially, if we were here last Sunday...)

we may not fully get all the symbolism, but -

the essence is clear:

the people were looking for a king, and -

Jesus seems to fit the bill

and so we join with the crowds...

maybe we go a little wild...

we wave our palm branches (sort of / kind of...)

we also want a kingdom (like the one Jesus promised...)

we also want something better...

but are our expectations any closer to reality

than those of the people back then?

- they wanted a warrior... they wanted political freedom...

they wanted vengeance on their enemies...

but Jesus...

while he came with pageantry and pomp...

came to offer "his passion..."

- came to challenge the people then...

even as he challenges us now...

in terms of what what was needed, and -

what matters most

let's see what we can learn of this from Paul's letter to the Philippians

### **l) Though He was God...**

if we know this story at all, then we know that the king and the kingdom

imagined by the disciples and Jesus' larger group of followers

was neither in line with Jesus' teaching, nor -

with what would come to pass

instead of a warrior king -

Christ was a servant king

though he was God...

... he became a servant

let's hear that statement again:

"Though he was God..."

that's what he is... who he is...

- what are we...?

relate -

Consider Jimmy, an angry young man who - because of cancer -

had to have his right leg removed above his knee two weeks after his diagnosis.

He had been a college athlete and that was core to his identity.

that's what he was... that's who he was... and -

from his perspective, the surgery that saved his life... ended his life.

He started drinking heavily, skipping school, and

isolated himself from his friends.

Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, his [counselor], encouraged him to show his feelings,

and gave him a drawing pad and asked him to draw a picture of his body.

He drew a crude sketch of a vase, just an outline. Running through the

center of it he drew a deep crack, going over and over the crack with

a black crayon, ripping the paper. It hurt to watch...

But with time he began to take notice of stories in the paper of others

in accidents in which legs or limbs were lost -

and he would talk endlessly in their sessions together on their behalf, \

“No one understands them” he would say.

Well, Rachel asked him one day what he was going to do about it. S

and... so began a new calling and ministry for this young man.

With his spirit renewed and with a new sense of purpose

he began visiting these patients in the hospital.

what are we...

when we drill down to our core?

who are we...

when the world around us beckons?

in Jimmy...

in the “kenosis” - the “self-emptying” of Jesus -

we see the essence of kingdom building...

of getting past all the barriers, and -

being actively engaged in the generative...

the fruitful... the constructive work of God

we join in on what Christ began...

as we understand that there is a different way to go about this

than we sometimes think is the norm...

i.e. - many of the models that stand before us

are of individuals who thump their chests...

say: “Look at me!”

and try to build by the twin techniques of

bombast and bluster...

Jesus shows a different way:

though he was God...

he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped...

but made himself nothing...

and became a servant

what are we...?

what can we become...?

## II) ... He Became a Servant

with the same spirit of humility, and -

the same willingness to serve -

we can join in the work of building a kingdom

with a willingness to serve as we are called - regardless of the cost -

we can change the world

- as we recognize that we are called to so much more than

attending the occasional Sunday worship service...

rather -

we are called to follow him -

all week long

and it begins by taking into ourselves

the same spirit of humility that animated Christ

so...

what happens when we do this...?

what can / do we become...?

relate - as with Jesus -

this spirit of humility (and key to remember: this is a radical spirit...

an emptying of privileges and advantages - such as might

attend a prince... a king... a god...)

this spirit of emptying... of humility... of service...

of sacrifice -

this is what leads to exaltation and glory and honor

relate - Palm Sunday would be easy to understand if it contained

only the familiar: kings, donkeys, crowds and palm branches.

In this version of the story, King Jesus would ride into town and

confront King Herod, and the one with the biggest crowd would win.

But *kenosis* (*this spirit of humility...*) turns our expectations upside down.

Precisely because Jesus emptied, humbled, lowered and abased himself,

God exalted him and made him the king of all creation.

i.e. - it's the opposite of what we might expect...

so maybe...

we should re-evaluate our expectations

and...

understanding how this “spirit of humility” results in fulness and glory

might aid us in the re-evaluation

cf. - as a counter-intuitive attitude -

similar to the looking glass in Lewis Carroll’s book where Alice

steps through, and finds a world where everything is backwards

Christianity is kind of like that:

everything works on principles opposite to those of

the world around us

i.e. - To be blessed, be a blessing to others...

+ To receive love, give love.

+ To be honored, first be humble.

+ To receive, first give.

+ To lead, be a servant.

+ To be first, be last.

cf. - Jesus did this by emptying himself and entering human life,

and he did this out of obedience to God.

Paul tells us that "he humbled himself and became obedient to the

point of death — even death on a cross" (v. 8).

Because of this choice, God exalted him and gave him the name that is

above every name, making him Lord of heaven and earth.

cf. - how can we empty ourselves...

... so that God can fill us?

(let’s start with the observation that none of us are the Son of God -

come to earth to die on the cross and save all humankind...

but...)

we are all of us, and - each of us individually -

challenged to show humility and obedience

as we walk the path of Christ in the world

how...?

cf. - we might try to develop a welcoming attitude toward others...

in a world and in a time where we keep each other at arm's length -

we might be intentional about letting others in...

we might try to be the servant of others...

as Jesus said: "Whoever wishes to be great among you  
must be your servant"

(and then - he washed their feet...)

we might try to be generous with material things...

we might try thinking the best of others, forgiving them -

when they don't know what they're doing...

we might try praying for our "enemies," and for those who "persecute" us...

we might try being a peacemaker...

we might do any or all of these...

taking to ourselves the truth that:

this emptying does not lead to embarrassment and powerlessness.

Instead, it leads to great fullness.

Jesus says that "all who exalt themselves will be humbled,

and all who humble themselves will be exalted"

Palm Sunday -

a celebration of Jesus, who rode into Jerusalem as the King...

a celebration of a whole new way of understanding what

kingdom is all about, and -

our place in it.

"Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord... and -

blessed are those who walk in his ways -

in the paths of humble service...'