

## Palm Sunday Liturgy of the Passion 25 March 2018

[Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16 Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47](#) Vanderbilt Lectionary

[Palm Sunday Liturgy of the Passion](#) March 25 2018 Textweek

The more you read the gospels, the more surprising they turn out to be.

It would be nice to fit them into pigeon holes. Then we could say, 'Mark says this,' or 'Matthew says that,' or 'Well, Luke is always coming from this particular direction,' or 'John always takes this point of view.' It doesn't work out like that. The four gospels can't be fitted into boxes.

Palm Sunday is a good example.

When we read Matthew's gospel, we feel as though we must believe. His story is compelling. He goes to a lot of trouble to tell us that Jesus was the One. That he was linked to God. That he had divine authority. That everything he did had God's mark on it. We feel that everything he says is building up to where we have to say, 'Yes, I must believe that Jesus is from God.' Look at all the evidence Matthew has accumulated. There's the genealogy. Jesus could be traced back to Abraham. Jesus' father wasn't a human father, but the Holy Spirit of God. The miraculous star. The astrologers from the east. The earthquakes. An angel seen by the guard at the tomb. The resurrection appearances of Jesus. The resurrection of many saints. Then Jesus miraculously ascended to heaven.

Enough, is our reaction. We're buckling under the weight of evidence. Is this is how it is to be? Are we to be hammered into submission?

But something changes our thinking. One word. One word that doesn't appear in any other gospel. Gentle. The word is 'gentle.' The writer describes Jesus as gentle. Twice.

'Come to me, all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy, and I will give you relief,' he writes. 'Learn from me, for I am gentle' (11:28-9). And then, in the story of Palm Sunday, Matthew identifies Jesus as the king who comes 'in gentleness.' (21:5)

For all that Matthew is carrying on like a pork chop about coming to faith, he says that Jesus is gentle. He won't force us into faith. He'll try to persuade us, not to compel us.

Jesus is gentle, not violent. And he shows it, Matthew says, by the way in which he entered Jerusalem. Here is your king, who comes to you in gentleness, riding on an ass. On a foal. On a beast of burden.

And when we think about it, it's only the strong who can be gentle. Weak people can't be gentle. Weak people are dominating people, controlling people. The only course open to the weak is the use of force. But those who are strong can control themselves. And be patient. And long-suffering. It is the strong who wait for opportunities to develop, and can bide their time.

This, in a nutshell, is Jesus, as he enters Jerusalem, today.

Holy Week begins with gentleness. And it reminds us of the way that God will deal with us, always.

'Throw away thy rod, Throw away thy wrath,' wrote the poet-saint George Herbert: 'O my God, take the gentle path.'

Help us, Lord, always to take the gentle path.

Help us not to be ashamed of weakness.

Help us to find our strength in you.

Amen.

John Shepherd

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