

SERMON PALM SUNDAY

ALL SAINTS BIRKENHEAD

REVEREND JORDAN GREATBATCH

A few years ago as a part of the diocesan ministry conference we went and saw the play Macbeth at the pop up globe. It was a fascinating experience. I am not sure if you have seen or read Macbeth. It is quite a dark play about one man's desire for power at any cost. He and his wife murder their way to become King and Queen of Scotland only for their kingdom to fall apart by bloodshed. It is an ancient theme. A lesson on the pitfalls of power. As Jesus said 'those who live by the sword, die by the sword'.

And it is also a theme that is in complete contrast to our image of Jesus as King from our Gospel reading today.

Today as we gather here on Palm Sunday there are signs of power and privilege and also royalty. Not Scottish royalty, but royalty of another kind. There is however no royal carriage, but rather a simple donkey, no studded crown with jewels and gold but a cruel crown bent and twisted with piercing thorns. There is no coronation throne, carved from the finest wood to be a place of honor. But a cruel cross, roughly sawn from off cut timber, a place of dishonor, humiliation and torture.

There is a welcome, a joyous welcome, with Palms and shouts of hosanna! These shouts however are soon replaced with the jeers of the crowd. There are no royal placards but rather a piece of wood,

with the crudely written words 'the king of the Jews'.

And as much as we try to avert our eyes from this royal pageantry, we are transfixed, not because of the finery or the majesty, but because of something else, something so profound that our language cannot even grasp its meaning. But we try; we try by using that word that has been so abused, so emptied of its power. That word 'love' for it is all about love. This king is the king of love. And we come, just as we are, to honor him.

And as we do honor him, we partake in his kingship, we follow his path, we die his death, and we are buried with him. And in this burial we affirm the reality of his death. And at the same time, despite the darkness, we also display that the Christ we worship is not the dead and buried

Christ but something more. As we head into this Holy week we hold together two seemingly opposite images.

Jesus the prince of peace riding on a donkey to the cheers of the crowd, and Jesus the king of the Jews being condemned to death by that same crowd.

Perhaps however it is okay to sit with these two images, because they represent for us how we feel during Holy Week. We know Jesus' triumphant love but also his awful suffering. We come to the realization that this paradox is a part of the story.

For as Jesus himself said "I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (John 12:24). So come; let us put our feet firmly on that ground this Holy

Week, and follow this king, the king of love who leads us through the darkness to light.