

## SHEPHERD AND PRINCE

2 Samuel 5:1-5  
Matthew 21:1-11

We read two coronation stories this morning: David's coronation, and Jesus' coronation. Actually, there were no crowns involved in either ceremony, but the popular acclaim of the people, their willingness to be ruled by their king is far more important than the trappings of royalty. In fact, apart from his actual physical coronation with a crown of thorns, this acclamation by the crowd is the nearest thing Jesus gets to a coronation procession. And the people shout out things that make it clear that they are thinking back about 1000 years to the day when David first became King over Israel. They had been promised that there would be a King like David, and they thought that Jesus would be this king like David and they were wrong: because he was and is far greater and his Kingdom is far more extensive. But they were right, because the things that were said to David when he finally became king are also true, even more true, of Jesus.

When the people came to David to make him King they had two reasons for doing so. The first reason was that they believed he could do it. They had seen what he had done when Saul had had him lead the army, how he had led Israel out - to battle - and had led Israel safely home again. They believed he had the qualities of kingship. More than that, the second reason they gave was that God had, in any case, already chosen and appointed him to the rôle. The story of Samuel anointing David had obviously gone the rounds by now, and they tell him that now is the time for that anointing to take effect. They quote God to him and say, "The Lord said to you, 'It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be ruler [or some translations say "Prince"] over Israel.'" (v:2)

This was what the crowds had to say to David and this was what the crowds meant in what they said to Jesus as well. If they expected Jesus to do as David had done and be a military leader, who would restore independence to the nation, they were wrong. That was not why Jesus came: that was too little a thing for him, to be involved only in the politics of one nation. Besides that would simply be to turn the clock back, and nothing fundamental would have changed. The people would still be more concerned about their national status than their status before God. The temptation to use worship of the one true God as a national totem, a badge of belonging, would still be ever present. Sin and death would still hold sway over humanity. And so in what the crowds said to Jesus they were wrong. They were thinking backwards and not forwards.

But although in what they expected they were wrong, in what they said they were right. Jesus was the Son of David, literally, but also in that the words spoken about David were even more true of him. He was and is the one who leads out God's people and brings them in safely, and God has appointed him to be shepherd and prince, or leader, of his people. This is why we worship and acclaim him, as our King and leader, not just for a day, but for ever.

He is, first of all, the one who leads us out. That is his task as our leader, prince, and King. He leads us out. David was an old-style military King. He had to ride at the head of his army when they went to win territory or drive out enemies. Jesus leads us too, not in an aggressive way, but in what you might call a love offensive, or a good news

offensive. (It is not, however, in that horrible phrase of modern politics, a charm offensive. Charm too often has connotations of emptiness, being all show and no substance, and since nothing could be further from the truth about Jesus, so nothing should be further from the truth about his followers.)

We have news to tell, news about Jesus. The crowds who cheered Jesus on Palm Sunday did so, in part, John tells us, because they had heard that he had raised Lazarus from death. They told the story and it encouraged the shouts of praise. We too have news to tell. After all, we believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus leads to new life, not just for one man, but for all who will believe and accept it. Each of us has our own story of how faith in Christ has changed life for us, in ways dramatic or subtle, but always fundamental. This new life is good news, and that is the invitation we have to give. How we tell and how we invite is important too. Jesus came into Jerusalem, not in a military, aggressive or boastful way, but in humility, on a donkey. We are on a good news offensive, called to be active in taking the news to others. We are on a love offensive, called to be active in living with love for others determining how we treat them. And we are on a humility offensive, making sure that the messengers don't get in the way of the message, not putting ourselves forward, but pointing only to Jesus.

So Jesus is the one who leads us out: he is our prince and leader. But he is also the one who brings us in, he is our shepherd. David knew first hand what it meant when the people told him that God had appointed him to be their shepherd, since shepherding had been his first job. He knew that it meant providing safety, food and water; that it meant being there to sort out difficulties, and to tend injury and sickness. A King's duties, even in David's days, are never just about leadership in time of war. The only reason that people go to war is to find themselves some peace, and space to live in. A shepherd King must provide for life away from the battle-front as well.

So with Christ, he calls us not only to go out in mission, but also to come in and know his love and concern for us. For Jesus, the King, is also the good shepherd, who knows his sheep and tends them. He is also the one who knows us, better than we know ourselves, and who understands when we are feeling bruised or weak.

He is the one who raised Lazarus, so that the grieving sisters might know joy again.

He is the one who healed lepers, bringing them back to health and society.

He is the one who gave sight to the blind, so that they needn't feel a despicable burden to others.

He is the one who ate with tax-gatherers, whom no one else much liked or trusted.

He is the one who fed the 5000, when it seemed they must go away hungry and weak.

He is the one who sometimes took his disciples away by themselves so that they could rest and be refreshed.

He is the good shepherd, and he tends each one of us with that same level of love and compassion.

Today we remember the day when the crowds hailed Jesus as their shepherd King, the Son of David, the King of Israel. We too hail him as our shepherd and prince. But we must remember that he is both. For some of us the temptation is to treat our following of Christ as only a battle to be waged. For some of us we must always be campaigning -for this issue, these rights, against this problem. And these things are part of following

Christ. But they are not the whole story.

Others of us, and perhaps this is more common, are tempted to focus solely on what Christ can do for us: to celebrate him as our shepherd but not our Prince. We find it easier to rejoice in his love than to go out and follow him. We are not called into Christ's love to simply wallow there, nor can we always call to others from our own place of security and safety, from where we feel comfortable. If Christ is our Prince as well as our shepherd, then we are also called to go out and bring others in to that loving and providing presence. But we are not called to go out, and go on going out until we are so weary that there is no more strength in us and we give up and turn away in disgust: our shepherd is always waiting to tend us and provide for our needs.

Christ is our shepherd and our King, our King and our shepherd, and on this day when we hail him our Lord, we also look forward to what we know was the next part of his story. The crowd when they shouted, did not listen to their own words. They had their own agenda of expectations, and Jesus, who will not be held hostage to anyone else's expectation, but only God's, soon showed them that he was not going the popular way, but God's way of truth and sacrifice. As we go into Holy Week, let us resolve to spend time in reflection upon the events of that week. Let us meet, as the disciples did, around the table on the Thursday. Let us stand, as Mary did, at the foot of the cross on the Friday. For if we do that then we will see who it is we hail as our King, who it is who shepherds us and leads us out. If we do that we will be the better able to celebrate with him the complete reversal of Easter.