

I wonder have any of you ever had the privilege to meet royalty? Alison when she was 22 received an invitation to attend an event in London for a volunteers' award ceremony where people across the UK were being recognised for things they had done to support their local community, and at the event Princess Diana attended. In preparation for the event, Alison went out and bought a new outfit. And as Princess Dianna came along the line of people, she stopped to chat to Alison. That's a memory she will never forget. Now the second occasion where we both saw royalty, was a few years ago, pre-COVID where again Alison was invited to the Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. I tagged along this time, and whilst we didn't talk to anyone royal we could see the then Prince Charles from a distance.

All of us probably have now watched the marvel and celebration of the Coronation of King Charles and Queen Camilla yesterday. The sheer beauty of the event was breath-taking and I'm guessing for anyone who attended the Coronation it will be a memory that will last for the rest of their lives.

Today I want us to think about what it means to be in the presence of the King. I'm guessing you already know that I'm not talking about King Charles today, but instead about being in the presence of King Jesus. You see whilst the anticipation of yesterday's events for many will have been overwhelming, being in the presence of King Charles will be fleeting as he moves on to see someone else, but as God's people we must consider whether our hearts are in awe of being in our Lord's presence, what it means to be a part of his Kingdom, to know that he doesn't flit past us to attend to someone else – no he wants to be with us forever. So we are going to use this passage from Mark 11 which I suppose is common for Palm Sunday, but teaches us a lot about how we need to surrender to King Jesus.

As we look at these familiar words, it doesn't really come across as a coronation does it, even though the crowds declare "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!". From what we saw on TV yesterday we know that coronations are not humble events, they're not unexpected, they're not unplanned, they're not unofficial. Coronations are certainly not to be reversed in a few days so that the one people are exalting as King, becomes the one who is rejected and executed. Jesus' entry was no coronation.

But the crowd had huge expectations for what they imagined a king would do for them, to rid society of the tyranny that was upon them from the Roman occupation. Their shouts of Hosanna weren't in triumph, it was a cry to be saved from their oppressors. And yet Jesus came not to be some powerful King. Instead, he came with incredible humility – not the virtues that one would expect from a King.

The act of laying down their cloaks was a sign of submission to the King, but in reality, they had their minds made up about what they were willing to lay down. Their shouts may have sounded incredible, but Jesus knew that in their hearts they had an agenda which Jesus wasn't willing to follow.

The laying down of the cloak was a sign of a person's willingness to surrender all that was precious for the King. And today when we consider being in the presence of King Jesus, are we willing to lay our cloaks down, all that is precious to us, for his sake? You see when we are in God's presence he expects us to not hold on to things. When Jesus called his disciples, they left all their home comforts behind to follow him. Simon and Andrew let their nets down and immediately followed him. James and John left their father Zebedee who was still in the boat and followed Jesus. If you search your heart right now, ask yourself, have you made any sacrifices to follow after the King, or does your life basically look the same?

You see we've got to set aside our assumptions, our hopes, our plans for the future, and give ourselves fully to his service. I don't think it's in any way an accident that in the chapter before our reading this morning, chapter 10, Jesus meets with a wealthy man who asks him how can he inherit eternal life. This man has been good all his life, he's obeyed all the commandments. And yet Jesus can see that there's something lacking. He tells the man, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this point the man's face falls, because he realises that he has become too comfortable, and therefore to give up everything for the Lord was just too much to ask. He wasn't willing to lay down, to surrender that cloak for King Jesus. And we can read this and consider it a shame, but all of us are holding on to things today that we need to lay down.

Are we able to say to Jesus, "Everything I have is yours"? And if not, why not? Why are we holding on so tight? Would it really be so bad if we let go? Would it really be so bad if we trusted God more than we trusted ourselves? I think if we're able to do that we all will experience a freedom from the chains that hold us back from the relationship that God wants with us. So let's take a moment to identify what those things are that we are clinging on to, and consider giving them over to him. Is it your security and your finances where you only give to God what you feel comfortable with? Is it your time where you actually spend more time on other things than in serving God? Is it your work where you actually give more time to it than you do to God? Is it things of your past that you have never really dealt with and God doesn't really get a chance to do a new thing in you because you still haven't got over it? What is it today? Why not surrender it now to the Lord. Lay your cloak down in surrender to the King.

So if we lay ourselves in surrender to him, then God will see healthy fruits coming from us. When I was in my early 20's a friend of mine was studying out in Seville, and so I decided to go visit him one year. I remember walking through the streets of Seville and the number of oranges lying on the pavements was incredible. The trees were bursting with fruit. And here in our reading, verse 12, Jesus is travelling from Bethany to Jerusalem and as he was hungry, he spotted a fig tree hoping to grab some fruit. However, the tree whilst full of leaves was not bearing fruit. Now our reading says that it wasn't the season for fruit so you could wonder why does Jesus curse the tree. Well it was because the tree was full of leaves and therefore should be producing good fruit. And it's an important image for us. We can look great on the outside, a bit like the tree, but Jesus could see that the tree was decaying and not producing fruit. It may be the same with us, and so the question arises about whether in the presence of the King are we producing fruit in our lives? We can say we have surrendered ourselves to Jesus, but unless there is fruit to show for it, then we might see a side of Jesus that we won't like. You see Jesus was angry with the tree because it promised so much and yet wasn't producing anything. And therefore this is an important picture for each of us.

Yes Jesus is loving and gentle and humble but He also expects His disciples (that's you and me) to be committed and faithful to Him. He expects us to bear much fruit for the glory of our Father in Heaven. And so what should those fruits look like in our lives? I think a good place to start is Galatians 5:22-23, but today I want you to hear these familiar words about the fruits from the Message Translation - 'But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely'. That's the kind of fruit that

the King is interested in seeing. And so the question it leaves for us to ponder today is this, if Jesus examines you today, what will he see? Will he see that you are faithful and you are bearing much fruit, or will he only find leaves and no fruit?

Here in this church family, unlike others, you are blessed to have the help to go deeper in your walk with God. We can support you to grow and to serve God more. Therefore there is no excuse for not bearing good fruits for God, unless we choose not to bear fruits, like the fig tree. That's why in our daily lives we must remain close to Jesus. He said to his followers in John 15, "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing". So if you are not bearing fruit then it can only mean that you are not remaining close to Jesus in your daily life. For those who love being in the presence of the King, we bear good fruit, and we are excited to tell others about what Jesus has done in our lives (Acts 1:8). Let's seek a deeper walk with God so that his gifts for us and the fruits of the Spirit are on display.

So again a question, how are you serving your King? Are you bearing much fruit for the Kingdom? What ways can you commit into this next season to display more of the fruits of the Spirit giving glory to your King through it?

The final section of our reading today describes how Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, and he enters the temple courts to see people buying and selling there. Now this wasn't just a few people in the temple courts, there would have been thousands gathered, and therefore what kind of Jesus do we have here that can cause a great crowd to clear the area. Can you imagine the look on his face that would make thousands of people feel they need to leave quickly. So what has made him so mad? You see in order for the people's sins to be forgiven they would have had to bring an animal to the temple to be sacrificed, but Jews were travelling so far that they wouldn't be able to bring the animals with them on the journey. So local people were selling temple animals right there in order to make a profit. And to purchase them, you would have had to use the temple currency, which meant going to a money changer and you would pay an exchange rate that was almost criminal plus then the temple tax. These people were exploiting an important religious tradition for their own benefit. And this made Jesus mad.

You see when the King comes to the house of God he's expecting to see people on their knees in worship and prayer. He's expecting to see people focused on drawing close to the Father, and not about religious practice for the sake of it or the exploitation of others. You see the people in the temple courts had become more engaged in the transactions rather than the relationship. But Jesus was looking for people who fall on their knees when they recognise their deep need of him for everything. God wants his house to be a place of prayer (verse 17), and when he can't see this he gets angry. This isn't the first time that Jesus did this. This scene from Mark 11 is near the end of his life, but in John 2 he tells us that Jesus early into his ministry enters the temple courts and creates a whip of cords and drives the sellers out. Feel this - the son of God, his ministry begins and ends in the same way by violently purifying the temple from being a place for profit or performance, and declaring that above anything else, his house must be a place of prayer. What should distinguish us as Christians and the Church is the act and atmosphere of prayer. I've said all along since COVID through what I labelled as RESET that we cannot become so caught up in activities and busyness, because when we do we then forget who it is we belong to. We become like many other community groups that run their events. But we belong and should be devoted to the King. Remember Paul said in 1 Cor 3:16 that we each are considered temples of the Holy Spirit, and therefore Jesus is not just talking about the gathered church being a place of prayer, each of us should place prayer at the centre of our lives, as we bow

before the King. Folks if we want to see things happen in this town and in this community and in us as gathered people, we need to be people on our knees in worship and prayer. Remember that the largest by far, the most influential by far, global movement in human history that has transformed millions of lives started in Acts 2 when people gathered for a prayer meeting. This whole thing called Christianity was birthed by a similar number as us today, just simply coming together for a prayer meeting, where people gathered in surrender to their King, and sought on the Holy Spirit's power to direct them. When Jesus walks into his Church, will he see us in prayer or will he see most at home putting other things in front of him? That's where all of this starts – it starts with an attitude to come before the King in prayer. So again, ask yourself, have we made the Church into an organisation where we think it depends upon the finances balancing, have we become so consumer focused where we only attend when we think it's going to make us feel good or suits us? Jesus comes in love to challenge our status quo. He needs us to fall on our knees in surrender.

Just as we now sing our next song, as we have just celebrated this weekend our newly crowned King, let's consider our attitude as we come into the presence of the King of all Kings, and the Lord of all Lords. Therefore what areas of our lives today, that we hold precious to, do we need to surrender before the King? Are we bearing fruit in our lives in our service to the King and if not what will we do today to change that? And finally have you forgotten who you belong to, is your life so occupied with the things that matter to you that you have forgotten that first and foremost you need to fall on your knees to your Creator and King in prayer? Whether today you are a royalist and have loved the weekend of pageantry and pomp, or whether you have no time for the monarchy, the one thing that is clear from scripture is that all of us, Charles included, will bow the knee and declare that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10). I'd love if today was the day in which all of us did something to draw closer to our King. Can I encourage you to not leave here without evaluating where your life is at today. Do you need to make King Jesus the centre of your life and purpose again? Our prayer ministry team will be around at the end for you to come to them. Most of the time our prayer ministry team sit with no one coming forward. My phone isn't ringing night and day with people asking for prayer support – which would suggest that either people's lives are perfect and therefore don't need prayer, or most likely parishioners don't want to place themselves in that vulnerable place. Remember that our community, our families, ourselves will only change for Jesus when we allow him to change us. It starts with us coming in surrender before the King acknowledging that we need him.