

PALM SUNDAY: JESUS - THE PERFECT ROLE MODEL SUNDAY 28th MARCH ANDREW GILES

John 12 v12-16

Matthew 22 v15 – 22

Over 10 years ago in the days of politically incorrect adverts there was a wonderful newspaper ad that clearly sticks in my mind which struck a major blow for feminism. It had scenes of a middle-aged mother in various caricatures throughout the day. There was the “devoted wife” ironing her husband’s clothes at 7am, the “caring mother” making sandwiches for the children at 8am, then in a crisp business suit making a power telephone call at 9am as the “dynamic businesswoman.” Over lunch it was the “caring mother” again preparing the evening meal in advance, then it was back to a “dynamic business” woman for the afternoon. The caricatures continued until late at night. It then depicted the real woman - the real person - sprinting from caricature to caricature through the day getting more and more exhausted, unable to properly fulfil any role before collapsing in a heap at 11:30pm. Not true for everyone but maybe some of us!

Obviously now it would be the bloke doing the sandwiches and cooking the dinner resplendent in his apron but that’s for another sermon.

We have so many roles that we are expected to fulfil. We are all sons, daughters, friends at the very least and many of us also have all sorts of important responsibilities. But playing a role means sometimes having to have great self-control.

I remember frequently at work when in charge there would be the burden of some secret awful news about to happen - that redundancies were being implemented, or we were about to lose a vital contract or someone was leaving for a major competitor. I would have carry these on my own lonely journey smiling and encouraging everyone as if nothing was happening, remembering Galatians 6:5 where it says “For each will have to bear his own load”

And how immeasurably worse Jesus would have felt about what was about to happen to him - when he reached the top of the hill from Bethany and saw the daunting sight of Jerusalem spread out before him as he descended into the cauldron of the city, probably via the East Gate, the closest to the temple

It was a very dangerous thing he was doing. 2000 years ago, the Sadducees had a tradition in which they believed the Messiah would appear four days before Passover. They kept the gates of the Temple open so that He could walk right in to His rightful place. Because of this, Jewish nationalistic fervour was at its peak on this particular day. The Romans would have all troops activated and on alert for this day. They feared the Jews would try another revolt under some religiously crazed radical as had happened in the past.

And Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilling the prophecy of Zecharia 9:9 (NIV). See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey”

He was filling a role on which the whole of humanity was at stake - knowing the crowds would later turn on him and also experiencing a great grief and sadness— the knowledge that he would be facing humiliation, torture and an agonizing death in a few days. The knowledge that one of his close friends would betray him and that the others would disown him, the searing pain of knowing the terrible grief his disciples and mother would experience with the crucifixion and that even his heavenly Father would turn away. But Jesus fulfilled his mission, his prophecy and his purpose with staggering self-control and asks us to do the same.

When we are fulfilling our roles what we need to remember is that we are not there for the applause. Of course, we need to be properly paid and all of us love to be appreciated. But in my experience doing the easy thing and not rocking the boat always got plenty of appreciation at work and that is true for every role. Confronting things that are not right or intervening in a conflict isn't going to be popular.

Jesus knew why the crowds were praising him. First, because of his miracles. He had healed the sick and raised the dead. They praised Him because he was doing these things for them for free and Second, because they saw in Jesus a way to be set free from Rome as Israel was set free from Egypt.

A few days later at the trial they saw a beaten and disfigured Jesus- a man who no longer looked like a deliverer or a conqueror. And as words were said about him, they bought into all the lies and quickly changed their position. And I'm afraid we have to be realistic about the people we serve in roles, at times they will be totally wrapped up in themselves and their needs.

We don't get much specific advice in the bible about fulfilling our roles and duties in this world as well as serving Christ but there's some

Romans 12:6-8 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us , let us use them. If in service- in our serving; the one who teaches - in his teaching; - the one who leads with zeal...

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do work heartily as for the Lord and not for men

In other words, do your utmost and best in your role because that is what God expects.

But the best advice was in our reading today: pay the Emperor what is due to the Emperor and pay God what belongs to God.

If we take a small coin which represents our job or a role and hold it right up to our eye it blocks out everything else. So, we need a proper perspective, to push the coin – our role- back onto the bible like this

I would argue we are Christians first and brain surgeons or whatever second. That means that we have to make choices about what roles we take on, and we might have to drop something if we need to if it is incompatible with being a Christian or we are getting like the lady in my opening example.

Now a lot of us have to be tough in our role at times and this applies to relationships as a friend or a relative – sometimes tough love is necessary as all you parents have found during lockdown. I used to think I was two different people, the tough one at work and the respectable Christian on a Sunday. Over time eventually I like to think I fused together more to become the same person but of course none of us ever get it right.

What do we learn from Christ about how to carry out our role?

Christ always put other people first and the smallest of people at the top of his agenda when doing his role and fulfilling his duty, whatever the cost.

He could have ignored the woman who touched his cloak in Mark 5 as she was already made well but he wanted to reassure her and show how much she was loved. He could have refused to engage with the woman caught in adultery but gave her the absolute assurance he did not condemn her. There was the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 who he spends time with. She was so filled with the Holy Spirit that afterwards she went on to convert many others and is venerated in the Eastern Orthodox church as a great saint called Photine and was later martyred. And finally his comforting words to one of the thieves crucified with him “Today you will be with me in paradise” He didn’t have to do that to fulfil his role, it just flowed, just exuded from him.

So as we carry out our roles and duties, sometimes unappreciated, we know that Jesus faced huge burdens and difficult choices so he knows how hard it can be for us. He fulfilled his roles and prophecy perfectly yet still made time for everyone and changed lives. If we can get the right perspective and keep Jesus in our hearts, we can exude Him, change lives like for the Samaritan woman, do our roles cheerfully and find happiness and fulfilment ourselves.