

Reflection on Palm Sunday, 29 March 2026 by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

Readings: Philippians 2. 5-11 & Matthew 21:1-11

Serving the Servant King

I often wonder what happened to the donkey that the disciples found for Jesus to ride when he entered Jerusalem on what became known as Palm Sunday.

One day, the donkey is tied up by a rope to the door of his owner's house; the next he's carrying the ultimate Prince of Peace along a crowd-filled thoroughfare the equivalent of the M40 on Cup Final Day.

Cheering crowds, palm fronds, pop-up bagel stalls and goodwill abounding. This donkey is in the midst of it, and he probably spent the next few years saying: *'I had that Jesus Christ on my back the other day. Nice fella. Very gentle.'* The donkey is important in the story, but I'll come back to that.

First, I want to look at Paul's Letter to the Philippians, particularly Chapter 2: verses 5-11.

As many of you may know, because I'm always going on about it, I left paid employment three years ago. This is my term for retirement. I've been working in a

voluntary capacity for a couple of charities but the freedom to arrange my life as I want it has given me the opportunity to meet friends for coffee, go to the gym, travel around the world and spend time with our grandchildren.

It is, therefore, surprising that a funny thing happened to me the other day: someone offered me a job and I said, 'Yes'. It doesn't really matter what the job is; it's fundraising for one of the charities that I've been volunteering for – it's the same work, it's just that they've decided to put me on a short-term contract and pay me for doing what I was doing already. As a friend who works in HR said to me: *'That's a no brainer, Forbes, just do it and take the money.'*

But it's not that simple. I had to effectively apply for the job and fill in all manner of forms and paperwork, including updating my curriculum vitae or CV or, as is more common these days, update my social media profile.

At the same time as I started to do this, I came across Paul's letter to the Philippians and read the passage about being humble. And it put me in a dilemma... because these verses present a dichotomy.

And if you don't know what a dichotomy is, I'll save you looking it up: it's where the same 'something' – a text, an idea, a concept, even a set of behaviours – has

two distinct interpretations which appear to be in conflict.

Paul's letter to the Philippians reminds us that Jesus, though being in very nature God, didn't cling to His status or privilege. Instead, He made Himself nothing. He took on the nature of a servant. The one who had all authority chose humility. The one who deserved to be served chose to serve.

This challenges the way we think about success these days. The world tells us to climb higher, protect our image and put ourselves first. But Jesus turns this upside down. He steps down. He lowers Himself. He washes feet. He touches the untouchable. He gives His life.

So, as I reviewed my career as part of my job application and looked at my CV, I suddenly felt uncomfortable... because you know what a CV is like, you know what a job application is like – there's a voice inside your head saying, *'Sell yourself, big yourself up, focus on your magnificent achievements.'* You know what I mean: a senior manager at work passes you in the corridor and says: *'Hey, Forbes what do you think of the company's new business strategy?'* And you say, *'Yeah, it looks fine to me.'* And that 10-second conversation goes on your CV as: *'Contributed to company's major strategic business plan, resulting in huge increase in productivity.'*

I read my CV and felt self-congratulatory and pleased with the charities that I have helped and the good works that I've done, and I was happy to post it off to my new employer, proud that I had so far made the grade, a lasting impression on the world.

But then I looked at Paul's letter to the Philippians and read that we are called to be humble, self-giving and servant-hearted, which is the complete opposite of pride. In St Matthew's gospel, Jesus warns us to be careful not to practice our righteousness in front of others to be seen by them, which raises the question: *'How do I serve faithfully without slipping into pride or self-promotion when writing a CV or applying for a new job?'*

In the end, I decided that it comes down to motivation more than visibility.

Serving others isn't meant to be hidden at all costs – it's meant to be free from the need for recognition. Jesus isn't saying: *'Never let anyone see your good works.'* In fact, elsewhere, he says we should let our light shine. The difference is *why* we're doing it. Are we serving so people will notice us, or because we genuinely love God and want to help other people? You see, it's a dichotomy.

One helpful way to think about it, I suppose, is that bragging draws attention to ourselves; faithful service points *beyond* ourselves.

You can do the exact same action – help someone, give generously, volunteer our time – and it can either be an act of worship or an act of self-promotion, depending on where your heart is. Only God and you will know.

One practical way of checking is to ask the question: *'If no one knew I was doing this, would I still be glad I did it?'* If the answer is yes, we're ok. If not, it's an invitation to realign our heart.

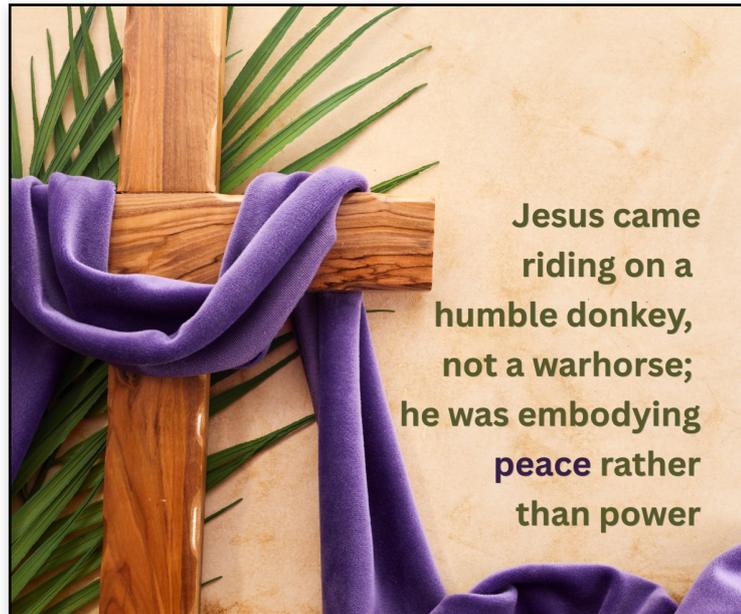
Ultimately, Jesus models this perfectly. He served constantly, often publicly—but never for applause. His focus was always on God and the people in front of him. Being a servant, then, is about strength under control. It is about choosing humility when pride would be easier. It is about putting others first, even when it costs us something.

Jesus didn't just serve when it was convenient. He was *obedient to death—even death on a cross*. His servanthood was sacrificial. It was costly. And that's where this message becomes real for us. Being a servant is easy when it's comfortable. It's much harder when it requires patience with difficult people, forgiveness when we've been hurt, or giving when we feel empty.

In our homes, it may mean choosing patience over frustration. At work, it may mean helping without

seeking credit. In our communities, it may mean noticing those who are overlooked and reaching out with compassion.

But, to return to Palm Sunday, it reminds us that Jesus' humility was not hidden – it was visible. As He entered Jerusalem, crowds waved palm branches and shouted *Hosanna*, expecting a triumphant king. Yet Jesus came riding on a humble donkey, not a warhorse; he was embodying peace rather than power.



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The same voices that praised him would soon fall silent. And Palm Sunday reveals that true servanthood is not about public approval but faithful obedience. Jesus accepted celebration, *and* rejection a few days later, without changing his mission.

He shows us that serving God may sometimes bring recognition, but it must never depend on it.

Amen.