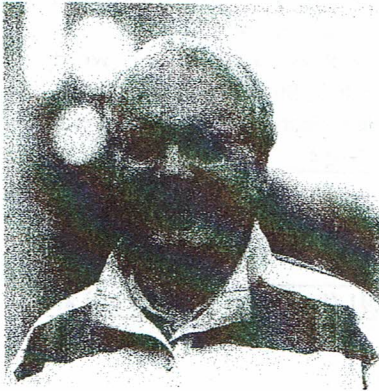


Revd Ron Ferguson writing in the Church of Scotland magazine, 'Life and Work'



A vulnerable Messiah

Ron Ferguson considers the Easter story.

THE legendary Anglican divine, William Archibald Spooner, had a nervous habit of getting his words mixed up. It was he who once memorably announced to a startled congregation: "We shall now sing the hymn 'Shoving Leopard of thy sheep.'" He could inadvertently reduce any solemn and dignified occasion to gales of hysterical laughter. He once announced a hymn as "Kingkering Kongs Your Titles Take".

Now a Kingkering Kong doesn't have quite the same majestic ring about it as a Conquering King. But nor does a king riding on a donkey. We all know what a contemporary king looks like, don't we? Robes. Crown. Majestic bearing. The horse and carriage. Or the Rolls Royce, purring through the streets as people cheer and children wave flags.

Think of another image, another city. Jerusalem, 2000 years or so ago. Crowds cheering, waving palm branches, as the king goes in to claim his kingdom.

Riding on a donkey...The Kingkering Kong. A sign of contradiction.

(How is it that Christianity came to be associated with political power and riches – a sign of respectability – when its founder rode into the holy city, on a donkey, on his way to certain death as a danger to 'church and state'. And what did Jesus think he was doing on that first Palm Sunday anyway?)

Jesus came into that Passover cauldron by intention. The stunning piece of street

theatre had been perfectly choreographed. A donkey had been booked beforehand – password: "The Master needs it". The crowds received their young charismatic hero like a monarch, spreading down cloaks before him. They shouted "Hosanna!" This didn't simply mean "Hello there, big man" as they would shout in Glasgow today. It meant "Save Now!" It was a people's cry for deliverance.

But why a donkey? We mustn't think of the donkey as a daft wee animal on a beach, with ice cream cones and all that. We're not talking about Muffin the Mule here. Jesus saw himself as fulfilling Zechariah's prophesy that one day God's Messiah would enter the Holy City on a lowly donkey. But Jesus was also signalling the fact that he would be a Messiah with a difference. The donkey was a symbol of peace and lowliness. Jesus had no armour, no army – just a bunch of doughball disciples who hardly knew what time of day it was, never mind that the hour of salvation had just come.

Jesus was a vulnerable messiah, different from the type of leader the people were looking for. He was armed only with love and mercy – yet the knives were out for him. Why? Because he was perceived as a threat by the Jewish leaders and by the Roman ruling class. What upset the religious class most was that he ate with sinners; not only that, he tore up the legalistic rule books and

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said that the love of God was for everyone. When he taught that the tax collectors and sinners would go into the kingdom of God before the religious and political leaders, his fate was sealed. For the sake of the nation this Jesus must die.

*Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, thy power, and reign. □*