

5 July 2026

Zechariah 9:9-12 Ps. 145: 8-15 Romans 7:15-25a Matthew 11: 16-19; 25-30

When I began to prepare this sermon, I decided that I would get it done early in the week. The weather had got a bit less demanding, so I hoped to finish all my preparation quickly. I soon discovered that this was a book from the Old Testament that I had never read. As I looked to find if I had ever bought a book on Zechariah, I got a joyful surprise. For this book was to take me back 55 years when I was about 25 years old and studying to become a preacher of the Church of England.

I went to Trinity College in Bristol and the Dean of Women was called Joyce Baldwin. She had trained women in China at a time when it was still possible to help the growth of the churches. It was not an easy job but she was very capable and I am glad that I had the chance of being taught by her when she came back to England. She wrote this book [holding it up] when I was there. The main theme is the arrival of a king who will live in the city. There is a call to sing and rejoice because the Lord has promised to come to reside in Jerusalem and his arrival is to be accompanied with wild joy.

The focus now switches to the character of a king. He is righteous in his work and he is just. When rogues continually succeed in getting away with their crimes, while innocent people suffer and find no help, to be promised that right will triumph, that the righteous will prevail is a cause for deep joy. The king has been through some ordeal in which he has experienced the Lord's deliverance and so is victorious, not for himself or anything he personally commands, but by the grace and the might of the God of Israel. His triumph therefore is the triumph of the faith of the servant of God – Yahweh. Other main themes are that the king is humble and rides on an ass.

The book of Zechariah is the last of the many books to be found in the Old Testament. No other books were written by Jewish prophets ever again. It was about 520 years before Jesus came on the scene. What is very significant is that Jesus comes into Jerusalem on an ass, as a humble king who is met with joy and hope by the Jewish people. The people who had come long distances to reach Jerusalem, and who saw Jesus and regarded him as a king, hoped that the Messiah would free them from the Romans. When the leaders of the Jewish people heard of Jesus riding into Jerusalem they did not see him as someone sent by God, but as a rival to be obliterated.

There is no doubt that when Jesus entered Jerusalem he was met with joy by people who had already heard about him and may also have come into contact with him. The reading you heard from Matthew's Gospel is where Jesus asks, "What picture shall I give you for this generation? It's a bit like a bunch of children sitting in the town square and singing songs to each other."

"This is how it went: You didn't dance when we played the flute and you didn't cry when we sang the dirge. What do I mean? When John the Baptist appeared he didn't have any normal food or drink, and people said, "What's got into him?" Then along comes the Son of Man, Jesus, guzzling and boozing, hanging around with tax collectors, people who are really stupid. (What we call in my home town of Manchester those people who are as daft as a brush). Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

The last part of the Gospel today (Mt 11: 25-30) is where Jesus talks to his Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, and we learn that Jesus has been given all things by his Father. The relationship between them is beyond us. Then we have that gentle voice inviting us, caring for us gentle and humble in heart and there we find that it is possible to overcome the difficulties before us. God (in Jesus) is meek and lowly of heart, he isn't boasting that he's attained some special level of spiritual achievement. He is encouraging us to believe that he isn't going to stand over us like a policeman, he isn't going to be cross with us like an angry schoolteacher. And the welcome he offers, for all who abandon themselves to his mercy is the welcome God offers through him. This is the invitation which pulls back the curtain and lets us see who the Father really is – someone who encourages us to come into his loving presence.