

Readings: John 12:12-19, Philippians 2:5-11

In a raid on the Comanchero Motorcycle Gang this week police seized among other things several gold-plated motorcycles, a couple of late-model Range Rovers, and one white Rolls-Royce Wraith - worth at least \$500,000.

The reason the gang had all these items was, according to police, to attract new members. It's a kind of marketing. When you join the gang you get the bling they said.

I'm obviously a member of the wrong gang. But at least with a 1995 Honda Odyssey I can shop at the garage sale and buy cassette tapes for my car.

Jesus too missed the memo that said to attract a crowd you need a cool ride.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem not on a conqueror's mighty warhorse but a young donkey (a symbol of peace) it was not the first time he had refused the trappings of the rich and powerful. John the gospel writer quotes Zechariah to help explain Jesus actions: "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion, look your king is coming on a donkey's colt."

Despite not having the cool ride, Jesus still pulls a crowd. This isn't a Sunday School pageant but a serious threat to the authorities. Josephus, the historian of the day, estimated that some two million people went to Jerusalem for Passover.

But the disciples would have been seriously embarrassed by Jesus turning up on a donkey. The crowds were looking for a champion to overthrow the Romans. But Jesus arrived on a donkey with his legs hanging down to the ground in humiliation.

I can remember being embarrassed that dad drove a bright yellow Morris Marina to pick me up from school. I never had the courage to ask him to park around the corner. But our Rebecca when she was at school asked me to park around the corner when I picked her up. Trying to be a sensitive dad I said, "Are you embarrassed by our car?" "No dad, it's you." That was a great comfort.

Jesus was the master of the enacted sign. His whole life was like a living sacrament. An outward sign of an invisible grace, an inward grace.

This Holy Week we reenact those signs. A humble donkey, a towel, a bowl, bread, wine, a wooden cross, nails driven into hands and feet. This is love in deed and in action. This is Jesus.

Paul attempts to explain Jesus, our window onto the heart of God, to the church in Philippi. Scholars think this section of the New Testament began as an early Christian hymn which was used by the very first Christian communities even before the New Testament was written down. Paul writes, "Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. Therefore he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

We call this week beginning today Holy because it wants to transform us to be more like Jesus in his servanthood. That sounds all very cool, but what would following Jesus in servanthood actually look like.

Dr Robin Youngson is an anaesthetist specialist on call for epidural pain relief and emergency caesarean sections in the maternity unit of Waitakere Hospital in Auckland. She recently wrote, "I could not imagine a more privileged and joyful role. But I didn't always see it that way. I work a 24-hour shift. Childbirth is not an office-hours business. Sometimes I'm called out several times in the night, exhausted and sleep deprived. In those circumstances it's only natural to feel somewhat grumpy and sorry for yourself. I used to carry my grumpiness into work with me and be intolerant of difficulties, delays or missing equipment. I wasn't always welcome in the labour room. It was an uphill struggle to make the preparations, to position the mother for the epidural injection and to communicate instructions. Occasionally the epidural wouldn't work well and I'd be called out of bed, yet again, filled with negative thoughts, tired and grumpy.

One day I decided to choose a different attitude. This wonderful lesson in life was taught to me by one of my patients, an elderly woman named Jessie. Facing major cancer surgery and probably death Jessie turned out to be the one to do the caring. Sensing that I was feeling afraid and vulnerable with the responsibility of caring for her she told me that I needed cheering up. When I think of Jessie's example it makes me ashamed to ever feel grumpy.

Now, when I'm called out in the middle of the night to a woman in labour, I think about the extraordinary privilege of being invited to take part in an intimate and life-changing event. I take great care with the spirit and presence I bring into the room. I notice it reduces the mother's fear and distress. I ask after the midwife, enquiring if she has been busy or has had any rest. It is a joyous experience. I don't care how tired I am. I go home with love and joy in my heart.

Now I feel like an honoured visitor. I am greeted warmly. I have the sense that my praises have been sung before I step into the room.

Quite suddenly I found I didn't have "difficult" patients any more. Paradoxically, the only person who had changed was me."

Robyn choose servanthood like that of Christ.

This Holy Week we are invited into a process, a process of letting Jesus be our midwife. To let Jesus bring to birth in us a change of attitude, his servanthood, to take on his mind, to grow more like him so that we may not take offence quickly but rather to see others as worthy of service and care, and so that together we might find joy again, even if we don't have a gold-plated motorcycle.