

Seeing Beyond

Reflections on art and Christian faith

Christ enters Jerusalem
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Stencil: natural pigments and ink on paper, 1982

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This is an unusual rendering of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: alongside Jesus riding on a colt and the crowd is a man who has climbed a tree to see Jesus. A reference to Zacchaeus? The diminutive tax collector who on an earlier occasion climbed a tree to spot Jesus in the crowd in Jericho?

Two themes emerge: the first is devotion. The crowds, of course, by placing clothes, palm branches and flowers down on the road for Jesus to travel over, are celebrating him. And the Zacchaeus figure is so determined to get a good view of Jesus that he runs ahead and climbs a tree; clearly he is fascinated with Jesus. And finally there is the artist himself. Creating this stencilled artwork involves multiple intricate steps: the hand making of the paper, the cutting out of the stencil, the colouring, covering, coating and washing with pastes and dyes. Hours and hours of meticulous work. Surely a labour of love and devotion on the part of an artist who was keen to bring the Christian message to his fellow compatriots?

Are we this fascinated by Jesus? What kind of devotion does he stir in us and how do we express it? Do we metaphorically climb a tree to be always on the lookout for him? Reading, praying, listening out for Jesus in our conversations with others? Or do we metaphorically roll out a red carpet? Looking on in adoration? The risk with devotion can be that of separation, of making the relationship asymmetrical, of not allowing the other to adore us as much as we adore them.

And separation is our second theme. By riding on a donkey, Jesus is separated from the crowd. No jostling around him, no surreptitious touching of his clothes. Indeed, in this artwork, the crowd seem distant, standing back in awe. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus is always looking for close engagement with people, countering the separation dictated by social norms and religious rules: children, women, lepers, even a recently deceased girl - he engages with them all without fear of contamination or concern for the opinion of others. That isn't going to happen here while he rides along on the donkey. It doesn't look like he is going to call down the tree climber this time, as he did with Zacchaeus.

So where does our devotion to Jesus lead us? To separation and distance? Jesus stuck on a donkey and us in a tree? Or to engagement and closeness? Jesus calling us down from the tree and inviting himself into our home and our heart? Are we, in our adoration and service of God, making sure that we let God love and serve us, too? So that we can form a close mutual partnership in which we dwell in God and God in us? In which together we bring love and peace into the lives of others?

Biblical References

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem ([Matthew 21:1-11](#), [Mark 11:1-11](#), [Luke 19:28-40](#), [John 12:12-19](#))

Zacchaeus in the tree ([Luke 19:1-10](#))