

Expectations Shattered

Mark 11:1-11

March 28th, 2021

These words of our gospel reading tell a familiar story that we celebrate this day. This familiar story has been told and heard, and celebrated year after year, to the point that its familiarity has hidden its profound meaning as much then as today.

For as you read this, things are not always what you think they are, and expectations raised of triumph are soon shattered by cries of “crucify Him” and death on a cross.

This story in the Gospels is referred to as the “**Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.**” It is treated so in our worship, music, and art.



It is the praise part of Palm Sunday, which soon turns into Jesus’ passion or suffering.

Let’s look closely at this event, which even the scriptures state was not understood at the time. John 12:16 says, “*Only after He was glorified did they realize these things had been written about Him.*”

When these events were going on their message and symbolic meaning were hidden. No one, but Jesus, realized that they were done in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, which says, “**Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!**

See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

As these events originally unfolded it’s hard to see how Jesus’ entry could have ever been seen as triumphant in His day and age; except for the expectations laid on Jesus after he raised Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus arranged to ride into Jerusalem on a young donkey, on which no one had ridden. Animals dedicated to holy purposes were supposed to never have been used in common service. But only Jesus and the owner, and a few of the disciples would have known this was an unbroken colt.

The crowds that accompanied Him would not have known this, but their “expectation” that He was “The King” was not dampened him riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

And so, because of their “expectations”, they treated him as if he was their **new political ruler**. The crowd poured out of Jerusalem and greeted Jesus with words from Psalm 118, which we used in our call to worship. This was a psalm that was used to greet victorious Jewish kings returning from battle.

And palm branches were being waved in the air. Palm branches were symbols of military victory in Jesus’ day, and their display was a declaration of national triumph.

But if Jesus truly would have been meeting their “expectations”, He would have ridden into Jerusalem on a war horse at the head of a large army. Kings that went to war, rode war horses. Kings that came in peace, rode donkeys.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem at the time of Passover raised huge expectations. The hope was the yoke of the Roman occupation would be broken, the earthly kingdom of David restored, and prosperity and dominance would return for the Jewish people.

The crowd saw but did not understand. Jesus rode in on a donkey in humility. A little while later, they learned Jesus’ beef was not with the Roman occupiers, it was with them. In a sense it was the joyful, ignorant bliss before the storm. And joyful it was. The crowds broke into a spontaneous recitation of parts of psalm 118.

There is a whole section of psalms written to be recited by pilgrims as they ascended the road into Jerusalem. The verse they broke into

shouting was Psalm 118:26. These verses were used to not only greet victorious Jewish kings, but by pilgrims as they ascended into Jerusalem.

And Jesus would have been entering Jerusalem from the Eastern gate coming up from the Kidron valley.

That day these words had profound meaning that even as the crowds spoke them, they did not understand. The most profound part came when they recited verse 10, *“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David.”* Because in Jesus Christ the Kingdom came into Jerusalem.

We can experience a bit of what this scene must have been like. Someone spontaneously shouting “hosanna” and then the crowd responded again and again. **“Hosanna” means “Save Now!”** and is shouted as a prayer and praise to God.

Let’s try this. I am going to say a phrase and I want you to respond. You’ll know how to respond. You’ll know what to say.

“The Lord be with you.”

“**And also with you.**”

“Lift up your hearts.”

“**We lift them up to the Lord.**”

These words of praise **are the opening from the “Great Thanksgiving”** of the sacrament of Holy Communion and are similar in common knowledge to the psalm quoted by the Jewish crowd that day. One person started it and then they all joined in. “Hosanna, Hosanna to the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” And who is he? The Messiah!

They had great expectations that day and it was a large and noisy demonstration, but it must have ended at the walls of Jerusalem, for there is no mention of the Roman authorities getting nervous that day. And nervous they would have been for the annual Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem attracted 100,000s of Jewish worshipers and the Romans

always feared Zealots whipping the crowds into religious passion, riot, and revolt, which happened regularly in Israel. It was the calm before the storm.

Jesus soon began to destroy the expectations of the crowd. His beef was with his fellow Jews and Jewish authorities. They had turned the temple into, to quote Jesus “a den of robbers,” instead of a house of prayer for all the nations.

The next day He drove out the money changers and those buying and selling goods, which as I spoke about a few weeks ago, which was a sign that he was the Messiah, the Christ.

The day after His triumphant entry, the crowds’ expectations began to crumble. By week’s end they were destroyed, and so they turned on Jesus and shouted, “Crucify Him,” and He was crucified dead and buried.

How in five day’s could acclamation turn to anger, condemnation, and death? I have thought how could “they” do that, be “that” way, turn on Jesus like that and then walk away. But then I remembered, “we” do that today. We have expectations for Jesus and His church which when unmet leads to a similar betrayal and abandonment.

Psychologist, Randy Carlson said, “**Expectations - reality = level of disappointment.**”

The Jewish crowds were so bitterly disappointed with Jesus’ peaceful kingdom that their disappointment reached the level of murderous rage.

They missed the signs that Jesus wasn’t who they thought he was. He rode in on a donkey, rather than a war horse. He led apostles and pilgrims, rather than an army, and He confronted religious corruption, rather than political domination. **He threw the money changers out of the Temple rather than Pilate out of his palace.**

A Savior had come - the true suffering servant Savior, but they did not want to serve in the kingdom he had to offer. They put on Jesus; “expectations” that were never going to be met for that was not who Jesus was.

We out of our ignorance do the same today. We make up a Jesus based on our ideas of who Jesus’ “ought” to be, what he “ought” to do and when he “ought” to do it.

Many have a fairy tale understanding of Jesus. For many their conception of Jesus is more like Santa Claus.

For some if they substituted the name Santa Claus for Jesus there would be no change in their theology. It is a theology of consuming and getting rather than serving and giving.

And we conveniently forget the Jesus who drove the money changers out of the temple. Who called the Pharisees white wash tombs full of bones and corruption, who referred to them as snakes, who was killed in his battle against evil, and who calls us to take up our cross daily and die for Him.

Our God is an unorthodox God. We often expect a prince charming, and we get a peasant riding on a donkey. We build up false expectations that lead to bitter disappointment and recriminations against Christ and His church.

How often I have seen people leave in anger and frustration from the church and the faith, having built up “expectations” for a God and Church that doesn’t exist. Well, what can we do to guard ourselves from false expectations? People expect the Church to be the gathering place of the ‘righteous and holy’ and it turns out we are just a bunch of sin sick sinners seeking God just like they are. It can be a big disappointment.

In the book of Daniel, we can see the faithful attitude that will save us when our “expectations” go beyond God’s reality and plan. Daniel’s three companions had just been told they were going to be roasted alive for refusing to worship the Babylonian gods.

And so, they said, *“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it. But nevertheless, even if he does not, we want you to know, O king that we will not serve your gods.”*

That attitude not of “expectations” but “expectancy” is what saves our faith and keeps us from turning on Jesus and his Church when we like the crowds misunderstand Jesus’ and God’s work in this world.

Life is very hard at times. It will hurt you to the bone. Disease, pandemics, deaths, betrayals, job loss and disappointments strike us all at one time or another in our lives. Our church expectations will fail us.

This pandemic has tested our faith. We like Gideon ask the angel of the Lord, *“If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?”* As he hid in his wine press to thresh his wheat so it wouldn’t be stolen by invaders.

We ask like the disciples in the midst of the storm as Jesus was sleeping and they woke him up and said, *“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”* After Jesus calmed the storm he said, *“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”*

This pandemic has made many afraid. The faith of some has failed. Our faith at times has failed. So, the question is asked, “in the midst of the threat will you hold on and will you carry on with the church and your faith and service to God?”

In this time some have abandoned worship because they felt God abandoned us, them and the world. But Jesus promised us not paradise in this world, but trouble.

Some have abandoned and refused to gather for worship because we have to sign these stupid waivers that even our insurance agent said weren’t worth the paper they were written on yet remind us of our covenant to take care of one another.

Some have abandoned corporate worship for fear of infection and believe me I know that fear. I volunteered to be a guinea pig for the Moderna vaccine to escape that fear.

Some have abandoned our corporate worship because we do follow CDC protocol to gather for worship, and yet others attend here because we do follow CDC protocol.

All are trying to do the best they can to take care of themselves and others. Many expectations have been shattered in terms of what we think the church ought to do and be in this time and what God ought to do for us all.

But the Church is simply a hospital ship full of sin sick sailors and passengers lead by a sin sick crew, and an earthly sin sick captain. The Church is not a cruise ship for the righteous and the holy. We are sinners desperately in need of a Savior trying to do the best that we can, and our expectations are often shattered. The cruise ship part of the journey of our faith comes in heaven. Right now, we have work to do. We must survive the current storm.

The Church exists for the purpose of pointing people to the Savior and the making of disciples; not meeting our expectations, and that for many is a huge disappointment. The Church exists as a place of service not being served. Just as Jesus came to serve not rule.

Jesus threw the money changers out of the Temple on Monday of Holy Week. He threw out those who had made God's temple a place of consumerism and trade. If God examined your heart, my heart, would God find us at church for what we can get or give? What are our expectations?

I don't know. But I do know that in times of trial for our hearts and the times of trials within the Church that we must say with Daniel's companions, **but nevertheless, we will hold onto our faith and practice.** We will not give up! We will endure to the end. And then God will in some way save us, carry us, and help us sail on.

The crowd on Palm Sunday held many false “expectations” for Jesus. If we hold “**expectancy**” rather than “**expectations**” for the church and Jesus and his final triumph, then in the end we will prevail. **Our “expectancy” will turn to deeper hope; our pain to deeper trust; our bewilderment to deeper faith.**

Specific expectations, especially when not in line with the scriptures will lead to bitter disappointment and abandonment of Church and faith.

But “expectancy” that God can take the worst that evil, and the world can throw at us and help us overcome; this “expectancy” will serve us well. We will conquer. Our faith will save us to the end.

For God took the worst the world could throw at Him - the slow tortuous murder of His only begotten Son and turned it into the salvation of all who believe.

So, if your life is full of disappointment, anger and hostility towards God and God’s church, because your expectations for your life have not been met, hold on to your faith. Face life with “expectancy.” For God is not done with you. You are not alone.

What is God saying and what are you going to do? Amen.