

In our Lenten devotional booklet, the selection for Palm Sunday begins with this thought: "Jesus did not choose an armored Humvee; He came in an old Ford Pinto. Shunning the numerous prophecies of a militant Messiah, Jesus deliberately orchestrated Zechariah's vision: Behold, your king comes to you humble and mounted on a donkey."

It seems to me that more than anything else, Palm Sunday is about expectations: glad and grand expectations on the one hand, and foiled expectations on the other hand. The first Palm Sunday was filled with expectations defined by expectations.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, expectations were high. Because His reputation preceded Him, many of the people believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah; the one who would restore the kingdom to Israel. They thought He had come to lead them to political and religious independence from Rome. They thought He came to lead them into a new promised land—a land flowing with milk and honey, lower taxes, perfect healthcare, liberty and justice for all. Some people were looking for a new Josiah, who would tear down the Roman idols and restore religious purity to the land. Some were afraid and expected trouble, seeing Jesus as a lightning rod for revolt, to bring the wrath and irresistible might of Rome down upon Jerusalem.

As we come to our Scripture for this morning, we may wonder why so many verses and so much attention is paid to the acquisition and use of a donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem. Seven verses in Mark and Matthew, and eight verses in Luke are pretty much dedicated to the donkey. Why all this fuss about a donkey?

The answer to this question is that Jesus is being careful to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-10, which says: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Jerusalem and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from the sea to the sea and from the River to the ends of the earth."

In contrast to other visions of the Messiah as a militant warrior king—the reincarnation of King David—for example, Jesus picks the one

seemed and still seems like a contradiction in terms. Who ever heard of a humble king? And when, in the whole history of Israel, was there ever a peaceful transfer of power from one ruler to another? The peaceable, humble, king riding on a donkey is a most paradoxical and even confusing image. Jesus chooses his mode of transportation carefully to fulfill Zechariah's vision, and to communicate that vision to all who witness His entrance into Jerusalem.

In David McKenna's commentary on Mark, he says of the donkey: "In our day, a donkey is the butt of our jokes and the symbol of stupidity. Someplace in the history of changing symbols, we went awry. By choosing the foal of an ass, Jesus gives us the symbol for His prophetic future. He comes in peace, not war, and He conquers by His Spirit, not by might nor power. For those of us who want to see Christianity represented by a leader on a prancing horse at the head of a conquering army showing off its trophies, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a defeat rather than a triumph."*

The truth of the matter is that Jesus went against all the expectations of those who greeted His entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He had not come to lead an army against Rome. He had not come to rid the land of Roman idols. The only trouble He meant to stir up was against the leaders of the Jews, who were turning the Temple into a market place and taking unfair advantage of the religious poor. But neither had He come to bring immediate relief to the poor, the sick, the hungry, or to the oppressed. The miracles he performed were signs of the Kingdom to be established through spiritual means not physical. They were windows into what is possible when all turn away from sin and trust and serve the Living God, windows into that time at the end of time, when Jesus returns to make all things new.

At the end of the Palm Sunday parade, the political and religious zealots were disgruntled with Jesus because it became clear that He had not come to lead a revolution against Rome or to knock down Roman statues. The common people were disgruntled because Jesus failed to give them the perfect welfare state most of them hoped for. Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law were disgruntled because Jesus' teaching against their hypocrisy was a thorn in their sides. Even Jesus' closest disciples were disgruntled with Him because now they knew it would be a long, long time before any of them could hope to sit on His left or on His right in His Kingdom. What kind of Messiah, what kind of King, comes riding into His capitol city on a donkey? It's so

It seems to me that Palm Sunday is all about expectations, glad and grand expectations on the one hand, and crossed and foiled expectations on the other. It is about the anger released when the glad and grand expectations are disappointed. It's about the lack of loyalty when the immature spouse doesn't get what he or she wants in the marriage. It's about the lack of loyalty the customer shows when the product doesn't perform up to the measure of his dreams. It's about the fickleness of the faith of some Christians when life gets harder than they thought it should be. We need to watch our expectations and be careful about where they carry us. Let us ask, what are proper expectations for Christians? What do we have a right to expect according to what is promised us in the Word of God? Perhaps having proper expectations will provide protection from false ones. What should we expect of this Messiah/King called Jesus?

Well, I could preach quite a while on what we should and should expect, but let me give you the Reader's Digest version of proper expectations. The first thing we can count on from Jesus reconciling with God. Jesus did not come to make everything right with the world. He came to put us right with God. He came to assure us of God's love "for God so loved the world. . . ." He came to offer us forgiveness of our sins and the chance to begin fresh lives as His children "while we were still sinners Christ died for us." He came to give us eternal life "that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Now of course, if you don't believe in God and if you have no hope for or fear of life after death, these promises will have no value for you, but to all who believe, this is wonderful news and the stuff of great expectation. To know God's love, to be assured of His forgiveness, to have the sure and certain hope of heaven, it couldn't be any better than this. **Every believer these are precious promises may expect to be fulfilled.**

Just to mix it up a little bit, let me give you another kind of expectation; some other things we can expect as Christians are troubled and persecuted. Jesus clearly said to His disciples in John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." We live in a time when not all our prayers will be answered the way we would prefer them to be answered. Life in the world is not easy and in some ways believing in Jesus even makes it harder. Paul tells Timothy in II Timothy 3:12, (notice the first phrase) "In fact (it's a fact), everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be

. third set of proper expectations I would put under the heading of communion." Jesus promises us communion with the Holy Trinity makes a way for us to have communion with one another. Jesus in John 14:23: "Whoever loves me will obey my message. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live in him." Jesus continues in John 14:25 and 26: "I have told you this and I am still with you. The Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father sends in my name, will teach you everything, and make you remember all that I have told you." Jesus said, "I will be with you always, even until the end of the world." God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." I John 1:3 says, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

I spoke this past week at the Lenten Luncheon at the Wehnwood United Methodist Church. I talked about loneliness and how our relationship with Christ and with one another through Christ can go a long way in helping us to feel and be less lonely. **We can expect communion with God and with one another.**

. fourth set of proper expectations have to do with meaning and provision. We can and ought to expect that lives lived in obedience to God will have meaning and purpose. One big thing we discover when we follow Christ is we are here in this world to make a difference. We are called to be light, salt, good seed, ambassadors and spiritual warriors for the kingdom of God. When we open our eyes to Jesus' purpose for us as the fishers of men, we have the privilege of living every day with the sense that this may be a day when my life, my word, my example, helps bring another person, another family into the light of God's love and forgiveness. Whatever work we do to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table, whether dull or stimulating, pales in significance before this greater work that we have to do for the kingdom. The other side of having meaningful work to do is the promise of provision. As long as we are committed to living as God's children, God will provide for our needs. As the psalmist says in Psalm 138:5, "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." Likewise, Jesus in Matthew 6, "do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' . . . But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **Purpose and provision will be given to all who follow Christ.**

And, then finally, there is heaven, that place where pain will be banished, tears dried, all disease healed, and death abolished. There is that place and time beyond time where and when we can look at the face of God and see the purity of His love and know the fullness of His amazing grace. **The gift of God is eternal life.**

It is terribly sad that the expectations of people in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday were so low and that they were disappointed and angered and rejected Him for so little. Had they only believed what He promised and taken Him at His word and received Him into their hearts, they could have known true Life and everlasting Joy. Let us make sure that our expectations are the proper ones as we embark on our Holy Week Journey. Hosanna in the highest!

*The Communicator's Commentary, Volume 2: Mark, David L. McKenna, ©1982 by Word, Inc., p. 226.

The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street
Altoona, PA 16601
942-1007/946-4110
4thstcog@nb.net

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Missed Expectations

Mark 11:1-11

Jon R. Neely, Pastor