

“Unwelcomed Expectations”

Psalms 31:1-8; Matthew 21:1-11 – Tesa Hauser
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Holy God bless the speaking and the hearing of these words so that we will remember the life and ministry of Jesus today and always. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

Today we are celebrating Palm Sunday, a day that is usually met with celebration in the church as we recognize Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the King of Kings, the one who ushered in the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. I know that we did not expect to be celebrating this day in our homes; nor could we have expected to be facing a pandemic and the consequences of such a virus. Expectations are interesting, and something I believe are at the core of the human experience. Expectations provide hope, or they can provide a buffer for disappointment; expectations can be dangerous when we forget that we are humans and that others are also human.

I don't know about you, but I put very high and maybe unattainable expectations on myself. During my time at home for quarantine, my expectations included painting our hallway, organizing our second room, and getting so much homework done, but I have done none of those things, not a single one. I expected it would so much easier to wake up in the morning and spend time in my Bible and be ready to face the day, but that has not happened.

The ministry of Jesus and Palm Sunday are filled with unwelcome expectations of who Jesus is and is meant to be. The Jewish Messiah is not just a religious or philosophical figure, but a political figure, from the line of David, who would topple the current kingdom or empire and restore the nation of Israel and be its king. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we see how the Disciples saw Jesus as this triumphal and victorious messiah threatening the unjust power of the time, Rome. However, the events of Palm Sunday are a reminder of the real Jesus and the realities of the kingdom of God.

In control of the situation, Jesus sends two disciples out to retrieve a donkey and colt, with no explanation other than 'they are needed for the Lord'. Odd, but most likely not uncommon during that time. However, inferring from the text, once the donkey and colt have arrived, Jesus says he is going to ride these animals into the city. The disciples help Jesus without question. The mouthy and sassy disciples are not found in this story. Now, this is just an assumption, but it doesn't sound like this sort of thing was a regular occurrence. Indeed, it is not, and it has everything to do with Jesus.

After winning a battle, kings would enter their city on a magnificent warhorse. The original verse Matthew quotes from Zechariah says, "Behold, your king is coming to you, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and mounted on a donkey." The omission of the words "triumphant" and "victorious" reveals an

unwelcome expectation of the great Messiah. Instead of violently toppling the existing power, the servant-king Jesus enters humble and lowly, on a donkey. As one commentary I read mentions, "Jesus has come to serve, but that he has come to serve makes him no less a king." Jesus – God incarnate – reigns, but not like human kings, not as the disciples or anyone expected. Jesus is a political figure, but not with violence or exaltation, but humility, kindness, and love. He is realized as the true king by a few in the crowd, and so entry into the city that defines Israel and their awaited Messiah, Jerusalem, is appropriate. Jesus is powerful but doesn't use his power like Rome or the other political and religious figures. His power is life-giving, redeeming, and transforming.

Look at those who welcome Jesus. They have nothing to give but their cloaks and tree branches to receive and honor their king, singing out, "Hosanna to the Son of David." The word *Hosanna* is originally Hebrew and means "Oh, save now!" or "Please save." They believe Jesus is the Messiah, from the line of David. He is the king who has come to save his people. His entrance into Jerusalem causes a scene, and by the end of the procession, the city is in turmoil. The word "turmoil" in the Greek means to shake, agitate, or stir up. It is also associated with the word for earthquakes; the scene of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem is a "seismic shift" in history!

Right now feels like a shift in our world's history. It is difficult to understand, to deal with, and to reconcile. There are unwelcome expectations of us to stay home, or for others to continue to go to work and risk exposure, and possible death. These days feel long, these weeks feel like months; our hearts yearn to be with one another, our bodies long for hugs and handshakes from those that we call sibling, friend, family.

Pastor Rebecca suggested that we should keep a journal during this time, and I encourage the same. Write down this time in history, write down how people who are typically looked down on, like grocery workers and bus drivers, are acknowledged for the work they do. Write down how indeed landlords, and lenders can waive rent, can provide loans, can provide extensions and temporary holds on payments. Write down how the church gathered in their homes and worshipped in spirit and through computer screens. Write down the amount of care, kindness, and love shown to neighbor and strangers alike. Write down the creativity, the music, the art that was created to help us cope and find hope.

Remember Jesus today, and every other day we experience this quarantine and remember the week he was about to experience after this entrance into Jerusalem. Jesus has unwelcome expectations about what is going to happen to him on that Friday. How difficult waking up that week knowing they were plotting against him, plotting to kill him. He most likely did not sleep much, nor did he rest.

I imagine Psalm 31 is one that came across Jesus' mind and lips during this week. The psalmist in chapter 31 is in trouble and is asking for God to protect them and bring them out of danger. Asking that God pays attention, that God hears them and delivers and rescues them from those who plot against them. In the end, the psalmist acknowledges it is God who can rescue them, so they put themselves into God's hand, God's care.

The week ends with Jesus crucified. He was murdered on a cross but not put to shame. The Romans used crucifixion as a humiliation technique to shame and repress whole family units. Legacy and namesake were important at that time and is usually the only thing of value people had. A person crucified was a criminal of the state, and anyone associated with them was seen as a criminal as well. Crucified persons died on the cross alone, and their bodies were not given a proper burial. Their bodies were thrown wherever; no oils, spices, and wrapping, their body not laid to rest. Though crucified, his ministry would not be silenced or shamed. Unlikely characters keep the name of Jesus and his ministry alive.

Before Jesus was betrayed and handed over to the authorities, a woman with very costly ointment anoints Jesus at Bethany. She prepares him for burial. We don't know this woman's name, but her actions will be remembered. She symbolizes those on the margins who constantly serve and give. While Jesus is alive, she models what it means to be a disciple. When Jesus is crucified, many

women were watching from a distance to care for his needs. They are in danger and at risk but decide to be there. A rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, uses his power and privilege to request the body of Jesus for a proper burial. The women and Joseph would not let Jesus' memory be shamed. His ministry and legacy would not be forsaken or forgotten despite those who tried to silence him.

The story doesn't end there, but I won't ruin the ending. As I mentioned earlier, let us look towards Jesus at this time. Jesus understands our suffering and our time in quarantine. The week leading up to his crucifixion is difficult; the days must have been long; his soul could not have found rest. Confusion riddled his mind, and his heart longed to be released from his anxious and troubled soul. We know the promises of God as seen in last week's message and Psalm. Jesus is indeed walking through the valley of the shadow of death. That means Jesus understands our worries, frustrations, and longings and is with us at this time. The psalmist in chapter 31 reminds us that we must ask God to hear our worries, our fears, our doubts. It is God who will comfort Jesus, and the psalmist, and it is God who will comfort us. It is God in whom we can take refuge and seek deliverance.

I urge us to also remember the woman with the oil, the women at the crucifixion, and Joseph. Remember that even though we are not meeting, we are still the hands and feet of Jesus. How do we provide the proper care and love to those who need it? How do we model our servant-king and the kindness, love, and

care of God's kingdom? If you are unsure, you are not alone. I urge you to remember that placing expectations on yourself during this time is unnecessary. Give what you can, do what you can, and take care of yourself. Spend time in prayer for your church, for your neighbors, for the stranger across the world suffering from the illness. Ask for prayer, reach out to others, hold people in your heart. We are in this together. Jesus is with us in this time; he will not leave us or forsake us. Soon, a new day will be upon us; soon, we will see that death is not victorious. Until then, into the hands of God, let us commend our spirits. Amen.