Palm Sunday Exceeding Expectations

Palm Sunday is the day in the church year when traditionally we mark the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem for the last week of his life, that is, one week before his resurrection. This is often called "Passion Week" to describe the final seven days of Jesus' earthly ministry.

As Jesus entered the holy city, the crowds were shouting **"Hosanna to the Son of David"** to celebrate Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. **However, a few days after such euphoric reception, many of those people all shouted, “Crucify Him!”**

The question that we all may be asking is: **Why? How is it possible this crowd that praised Jesus became the crowd that rejected Jesus?**

The answer: **because Jesus did not live up to their expectations!** They had had very particular expectations of Jesus. They believed that he might be the Messiah that will bring political, social, and military liberation from the Romans. They were longing for a war leader that would restore the kingdom of King David.

These people wanted liberation and peace and were expecting to get it from a strong man with a sword, but they were disappointed.

**Isn’t it true that life does not always turn out the way we want it to?**We often have expectations of what life is supposed to be or what this life is supposed to provide to us, but we get disappointed. And we pray to ask God, “Do you even hear me or care about me?”

**Unmet and misguided expectations are among the most challenging things we have to deal with as people—perhaps even more as Christians.** **We tend to write out our life plans and then expect God to make it all happen.**

For example, we have this expectation that if we study hard in school and get a good education, we will be able to get a good job, earn good money, and then have a good life. Or if we come to church, say our prayers, serve people, and offer ourselves to God, everything will be blessed—exempting us from the bad.

**But life sometimes does not turn out the way we had hoped it to be.** And Palm Sunday is one of those days when things did not turn out the way many people expected.

To this, Jesus said the following in Luke 19: 41-42,

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

Up to this point, Jesus had made a name for himself as the worker of miracles. He had healed leprosy with a touch; he had made the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk; he had commanded the unclean spirits and they obeyed him; he had stilled storms and walked on water and turned five loaves and two fish into a meal for thousands.

**People knew he was supernaturally powerful and nothing could stop him. He could just speak and Pontius Pilate would perish and the Romans would be scattered.**

However, what they did not understand is that Jesus was not coming to establish an earthly kingdom or to destroy people but had come, as John the apostle explains in John 3:17,

"God did not send the Son into the world to condemn (or destroy) the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Jesus brought a different kind of kingdom, one of peace and life and not of war and death.

Therefore, it is not surprising that he disappointed many people who were expecting him to destroy the Romans and establish a powerful kingdom like king David's. **The masses were yearning for a strong man who would crush their oppressors and save them from despair.**

**But Jesus refused the sword.** Instead, he took the bread and fed the hungry, grabbed the bandages and healed the sick, and opened his arms and welcomed the outcasts to his table, and forgave those who nailed him to the cross.

So, **when Jesus did not live up to their expectations, they turned against him.** And, in addition to the disappointment of the masses, he was already hated by many of the religious leaders too, "The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him." (Luke 19:47)

It is clear that Jesus knew what was waiting for him in Jerusalem, and I am talking about the resistance, rejection, unbelief, and hostility; the betrayal, mockery, shame, and murder. **When Jesus went to Jerusalem, he was moving intentionally toward suffering and death. Jesus knew he was entering Jerusalem to die.**

This should give us goosebumps! Why? Because Jesus was denying himself to acknowledge us—he was putting himself down to lift each of us to God**. Jesus was not brought to Jerusalem; he came by choice because chose us.** He was not accidentally entangled in a trap of injustice, but he chose to face death to give us all the power of his resurrection, and with it, the victory over sin and death.

This leads us back to our text where Jesus was weeping and making this statement, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!"

When Jesus made the statement is not because Jerusalem did not know “the things that make for peace.” He does not mean he never told them what they were. Jesus had already cried out in Luke 13:34,

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

There is the answer: the terms of peace had been spelled out again and again, as affectionately and as firmly as a hen goes after her chicks to protect them. Why were the prophets sent to them? What did Jesus come to teach and preach?

Many prophets before Jesus and many times Jesus himself went a long way to clarify that the current expectations for a political, warrior Messiah were misguided. He taught it and he modeled it through his words and deeds. (I am thinking about forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion, mercy, justice, faith, hope, and love.) Yet, he is weeping because they are still hidden from their eyes. The people that God had called knew the terms of peace but rejected them many times.

Here is a hard question for us: **How many times has Jesus wept over each of us because we were misguided and set on a path that would never lead to our peace? Even worse, we were so upset with God for not meeting our expectations and blessing our plans, blaming him for our suffering and pain.**

I know there is anger, sadness, and fear in those moments. Anger because you are mad that your expectations were not met and start looking to blame someone for it: others, yourself, and sometimes God. Sadness because you grieve the loss of what did not happen. And fear because you are afraid that your expectation will continue to go unmet.

We have been there. How are we supposed to respond? What do we do? Instead of trying to give you a clean, clinical answer, let me say this: **God’s plan for us may not meet our finite human expectations, but it will certainly, ultimately exceed all of them.**

**Here is a profound truth: God’s thoughts, his desires for us, far exceed our wildest expectations.** When we pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven…” what do we think we are asking from God? To far exceed our expectations! But we rarely realize this because we have not considered the possibility or idea that heaven is much more than the best we could get from earth.

What I am saying here is for us to start to see and define our place and purpose in life from the big picture perspective, the heaven one, as opposed to the immediate emotions and challenges we are facing.

So, what are the things that make for peace? They come from loving and caring for one another as Jesus taught us, and making our life choices along with those principles and not out of greed or hate.

**Our ultimate hope is not in a strong man with a sword or in government or political leaders; it is in and through the presence of God in us and through us.**

On this Palm Sunday and every day, we are presented with a unique opportunity to reflect on our faith and how we see Jesus in our lives: Is he the strong man we expect to destroy our enemies? Or are we listening to him and following his example?