Palm Sunday is the day in the liturgical church calendar 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.

“Hosanna” was the shout of praise made in recognition of the messiahship of Jesus, the one who would come from King David's genealogy and restore the glory of his kingdom. The word “hosanna” meant, “save us!” So, by shouting “Hosanna!” as Jesus entered Jerusalem, they declared the expectation they had of him as a savior.

Was Jesus the savior they expected? It did not take long for them to be disappointed. A few days after such euphoric reception, many of them shouted, “Crucify Him!”

The question that we all may be asking is: Why? How is it possible this crowd who praised Jesus became the crowd that rejected Jesus? What caused their disappointment and made them turned against him?

The answer is this: because Jesus did not live up to their expectations! They had very particular expectations of Jesus. They believed that he might be the Messiah that would bring political, social, and military liberation from the Romans. More than a savior, they were longing for a war leader that would restore the kingdom of King David. These people wanted independence through war and expected to get it from a strong man with a sword, but they were let down.

This speaks to us too. 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 for us, but we get disappointed. We pray, work hard, and try to be good but still struggle in ways that do not seem fair. You may have even prayed, saying, “Do you even hear me or care about me?”

I know there have been times in your lives when God did not deliver for you—welcome to the club. Have you ever wondered how God can disappoint us if he knows everything and is all-powerful? Why would God not do what we believe is best for us?

In my experience, unmet 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, pray for them, give them to God, and then say, “make it happen!”

Sadly, sometimes that is how we are taught, “If you pray with faith, you will receive it.” So, we grow with the expectation that we will get our blessing if we come to church and say our prayers. And then we don’t and get all upset and bitter.

I don’t have to tell you this, but you know that life sometimes does not turn out the way we had hoped. And Palm Sunday is one of those days when things did not turn out the way many people expected. And it is not because God let them down but because they were short-sighted; they could not see the big picture of what God was doing for them. They had imagined a particular way of how God was supposed to bless them, and they could not see beyond that.

This happens all the time; we leave little to no room for God to surprise us, to work in mysterious ways. But if there is one thing we should always do, it is to leave God room for the unknown, the unexpected turn of events. And I don’t mean a “closet-size” space, but a large living room—pun intended. Because if we live expecting to be surprised, allowing God to do what God does, our lives will be much better.

However, we are short-sighted like the people on Palm Sunday. We want our present feelings, ideas, and expectations to be validated and fulfilled because we know what is best. But do we?

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. They imagined he could just speak and Pontius Pilate would turn to dust, and the Romans would be scattered. However, what they did not understand is that Jesus was not coming to kill and destroy people (that is what the devil does) 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’ kingdom was (and is) one of peace and life and not of war and death. Therefore, it is not surprising that he disappointed many people who expected him to raise a sword and lead an army against the Romans to establish a powerful kingdom like king David’s.

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

That is why people turned against him. He was not a strong man with a sword but a healer with bandages and bread. So, when Jesus did not live up to their expectations—what they thought was best—they turned against him.

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)

So, as Jesus entered Jerusalem, he knew what was waiting for him there: resistance, rejection, unbelief, and hostility; betrayal, mockery, shame, and manslaughter. Unlike us, he was not short-sighted; he could see the big picture. As he went to Jerusalem, Jesus was intentionally moving toward suffering and death. He knew he was entering Jerusalem to die—still, he went.

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 and accidentally entrapped in a trap of injustice; no, he came by choice because he chose us to give us life through the power of the resurrection.

That is what Jesus was up to. His plan was not to kill enemies but to give life to his people. But many times, we are blind to see what God is doing because we are short-sighted and have already decided what God needs to do on our behalf.

For example, when we pray and don’t get what we want, I believe we are not disappointed because God does not hear our prayers but because we are not opening ourselves to the possibility that God may have other plans for us. But we would not know that because we are not listening enough.

So, our short-sight is often due to our inability to listen to God more. We are not blessed not because the blessing was not granted but because we were looking for something else outside God’s plans and missed his actual blessing. And that is the tragedy for many on Palm Sunday and the following days. They asked for salvation but missed the Savior because he was not what they had in mind.

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!”

The terms of peace had been spelled out repeatedly, as affectionately and firmly as a hen goes after her chicks to protect them.

For example, 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 “the things that make for peace” and modeled them through his words and deeds. I think about forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion, mercy, justice, faith, hope, and love. Yet, many had rejected these “things,” and for that, Jesus wept.

Here is a hard question for us: How many times has Jesus wept over each of us because we rejected his ways and instead chose 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 that we blamed him for our suffering and pain and then walked away from him.

I have heard those stories of people telling me they have not been to church in many years because they were disappointed and gave up on the church and their faith. It is a serious matter that requires deep healing. There might be anger, sadness, and fear that have taken root, and it is very difficult to let go. Still, deep down, they know they care but have a hard time letting go because they are afraid of being vulnerable and opening themselves to more disappointment.

We have been there. How are we supposed to respond? What do we do? I can tell you what I believe and have experienced: God’s desire for us may not meet our finite human expectations, but it will undoubtedly exceed them all.

Here is a profound truth: God’s thoughts, his desires for us, far exceed our wildest expectations. When we pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), what do we think we are asking from God? To far exceed our expectations! This prayer basically says, “Don’t do what we think is best, but what you know is best.”

Today we are invited to see ourselves and define our place and purpose in life from the “big living room” perspective, the heaven one, instead of the “closet-size” immediate emotions and challenges we are facing today.

Our 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. So, let’s not be short-sighted but let us let God exceed our expectations!