

PALM SUNDAY
THE DISCIPLES
John 12:12–19

Have you ever had your expectations ruined by reality? You believed things would turn out one way, but that was NOT what happened at all? You thought the meal looked good on the restaurant's menu, and you couldn't wait for it to arrive so you could enjoy it. But it didn't look so good when it was served, and tasted worse. Expectations ruined by reality.

You thought your friend had taken a good picture of you, but when you looked at it, you immediately wanted a retake.

You thought loading the car for the trip would be easy, but your children wanted to bring so much stuff that even a magician wouldn't be able to squeeze it all into a car the size of yours. Expectations can get smashed when they meet up with reality, don't they?

Palm Sunday is *all* about expectations meeting reality. Christ's Palm Sunday parade into Jerusalem wasn't the only parade Jerusalem had ever seen. Roman historians tell us that the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, regularly held military parades—parades of cavalry mounted up high on fine horses, and soldiers who marched into the city of Jerusalem.

Pontius Pilate's parades entered Jerusalem from the west side of the city. That's the opposite side from which Jesus would enter. Pontius Pilate would lead Roman soldiers on horseback and on foot. Each soldier would be clad in leather armor polished to a high gloss. On each soldier's head, hammered helmets would gleam in the bright sunlight. At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel; in their hands, each soldier would carry a spear. Or if he was an archer, he carried a bow with a sling of arrows across his back. Drummers would beat out the cadence of the march. The message was clear. Peace came through Roman might and power. Historians call it *Pax Romana*—Roman peace.

On Palm Sunday, Christ's disciples expected that Jesus, coming from the eastern side of the city, would defeat the Roman legions and bring Jewish peace. The crowd on that Sunday proclaimed, ***"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"*** *John 12:13*. The word *Hosanna* means "Save us now!" Hosanna was the cry for King Jesus to replace *Pax Romana* with Jewish peace. They even waved palm branches. Palm branches were an ancient sign of Jewish nationalism and victory! Palm branches stirred their heart the way that the American flag stirs our hearts when we sing through the rockets' red glare and bombs bursting in air our flag was still there!

Jewish peace – not peace through the crushing might of Roman occupation. Jewish peace -- through King Jesus! That's what people expected was happening as Jesus entered Jerusalem.

Now consider the reality. ***"And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!'"*** *John 12:14–15*.

The main battle tank of the United States Army is the M1A2 Abrams tank. It has a 120 mm cannon that can shoot targets 2 ½ miles away. On board computers automatically calculate distance, speed, elevation so that it hits its target. It has night vision capabilities to operate in the dark, and it can distinguish between friendly and enemy objects. It weighs 67 tons, has a top speed of 45 miles per hour, and can fire while moving. Each tank costs about \$9 million. It is a BEAST on the battlefield.

In ancient times, the BEAST on the battlefield was literally a beast. The Roman chariot was feared then like the tank is today. Horses and chariots brought victory on the battlefield! Horses and chariots were THE symbol of ultimate power.

Jesus rides into Jerusalem, however, on a *donkey*. Not a warhorse, not a stallion. He has no chariots, no army, no sword, no helmet, and no spear. A donkey then was like the work truck used

around the farm today. Nothing fancy. Ordinary. Beat up. Not a sign of power and military might at all! What is Jesus thinking?

No wonder John writes, ***“His disciples did not understand these things”*** *John 12:16*. They didn’t have a clue! This theme of the disciples not understanding Jesus is repeated over and over in John’s Gospel.

Let me give you some examples: (1) The master of the Cana wedding feast doesn’t realize where the wine has come from (*John 2:9*). (2) Jews believe Jesus will rebuild the temple in three literal days (*John 2:20*). Jesus, of course, wasn’t talking about putting up a brick and mortar building in 3 days. Jesus was talking about the place where God lived on earth – which was Jesus’ body – being raised up alive in 3 days.

Here's another example of not understanding: Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born again. Jesus means that sin has brought death to all people so all people need *new life* – new *spiritual* life. But Nicodemus thinks Jesus is talking about a literal second physical birth from his mommy. (*John 3:4, 9*). Add to this the Samaritan woman misconstrues Jesus’ reference to “living water” (*John 4:10–15*). The man who was healed doesn’t know who did it (*John 5:13*). The crowd wants to make Jesus an earthly king because Jesus gave them bread (*John 6:15*). “Not even His brothers believed in Him” (*John 7:5*). The disciples don’t realize that Lazarus is dead when Jesus says he has “fallen asleep” (*John 11:11–13*). Peter in the Upper Room fails to understand the significance of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet and so Peter refuses. (*John 13:6–11*). Peter, by cutting off Malchus’s ear, shows that he fails to understand Jesus’ intention to go to the cross and die for us. (*John 18:10–11*). On Easter morning Mary Magdalene meets Jesus alive again, but does not recognize Him (*John 20:14–15*). Seven disciples go fishing and when Jesus shows up they don’t recognize their risen Lord (*John 21:4*).

That’s quite a list! All this misunderstanding would make for a good comedy, but it’s sad that it’s all true!

It reminds me of a story Art Holst used to tell. Holst was a referee in the NFL. During one game, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Fred Arbanas was tackled so hard that his artificial eye popped out. After a search, the missing eye was found. Arbanas popped it back into place, declined the coach's offer to send in a sub, and was eager to resume play. Holst playfully said to Arbanas, "Fred, I'm impressed. But what if you had lost the other eye?" "That's easy," snapped Arbanas. "I'd become a referee!" Referees aren't the only ones who are blind. So are people throughout John's Gospel. So are we!

Let's face it. God tells us in the Bible: ***"Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ"*** 2 Corinthians 4:4 There are times when we are spiritually blind because we want a different Savior. We desire a Savior who can instantly fix what's wrong in our lives, heal our hurts, and miraculously deliver us from disease and from all sorts of doom and gloom. We expect Jesus to give us only sweetness and light, happiness and heaven.

Like I said, expectations can get smashed when they meet up with reality. Do they ever! Judas had expectations of Jesus. When Jesus didn't meet those expectations Judas betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver.

Peter had expectations that did not include Jesus being betrayed, arrested, and hauled off to be tortured. So when he got surprised by reality in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter grabbed a sword and ended up cutting off an ear of the high priest's servant.

The disciples didn't expect any of this so they ran away, abandoning the Savior.

By Friday, most of the Jews realized that Jesus wasn't going to bring in the Jewish peace they desired, so they ended up rejecting Jesus, crying, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

No wonder that by Friday, Jesus was hanging under a sign indicating why Rome executed him: ***"This is Jesus, the King of the***

Jews” *Matthew 27:37*. The people were looking for a king who had pomp and power. They missed seeing that God offers lasting, enduring peace through the King who came in riding on a humble donkey; a King who did not ascend a throne in a palace, but He was lifted up on a cross where He gave everything He had so that His people could live – forever!

The people did not see – they did not get it! But all is not lost! God turned the darkness of Good Friday into the light of Easter. God turned a death on a cross with horrific suffering into an empty tomb with great joy. God turned the pain of the cross into lasting peace.

And this is the kind of peace we need! God guided Paul to write for us in the Bible: ***“Since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.”*** *Romans 5:1* Jesus’ giving His life for us removes our sin problem, our punishment we deserve for our sins in eternal hell problem. Jesus has opened the way of peace *with* God the Father.

Being at peace *with* God makes a difference inside of you. You feel different. Relieved. Your heart and mind experience peace. You have the peace *of* God knowing that, because of Jesus, God is *for* you and *with* you always. Your life is in His hands. He will sustain you to get through the tough stuff in life, and in the end heaven is waiting! Again, God guided Paul to write for us: ***“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** *Philippians 4:7* God even established a way to deliver this peace to you in concrete, actions, in specific places and times that you can remember and that reassure you. He delivers peace in the Gospel proclaimed, in Holy Baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper. What an amazing, gracious God. He’s *WAY* than anything we can cook up in our own expectations!

I’ve met people who say, “I made my peace with the man upstairs.” What they really mean is that they have a cease-fire with God. “God, You stay on Your side of the fence, and I’ll stay on mine.” “God, You stay up in heaven and do Your thing, and I’ll stay

on earth and do my thing.” “God, if You don’t bother me, I won’t bother You!” That’s not having peace with God. That’s having a cease-fire with God. God offers so much more! He offers you a relationship! A relationship with your loving, humble King!

John, who wrote the Bible book named after him, he *GOT* it. He understood. In his Gospel he included Christ’s wonderful promises of peace. I invite you to stand beneath the cross and receive, believe, trust these beautiful promises of Jesus to you: ***“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you” John 14:27. “I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” John 16:33. “Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’ ” John 20:19.*** Do you want amazing, true expectations of Christ that will never disappoint? There they are! Only because of Jesus, these are reality!

On April 11, 2009, a middle-age and slightly overweight Scottish woman walked out from behind a theater curtain. Her hair was going in all different directions, and she was wearing a dress that wasn’t very flattering. People in the audience rolled their eyes and let out a collective sigh of disappointment. No one expected anything from this woman. That was the way it was, when Susan Boyle began to sing.

After her song, though, people exploded with applause! The video clip of Susan Boyle became the most-watched YouTube video at the time. Her first recording broke all sales records. Susan Boyle wasn’t what people expected. Susan Boyle was much more!

Expectations can get smashed when they meet up with reality, don’t they? The reality is that Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. The reality is that He suffers, bleeds, and dies. The reality is that we are called to take up our cross. The reality is that sometimes prayers go unanswered, hopes are dashed, and deliverance from debt and depression doesn’t come like we want.

Christ's disciples had wrong expectation. But they didn't stay in the dark about Palm Sunday forever. John writes, ***"His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him"*** John 12:16. The disciples finally understood the peace of Jesus and—by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit—so shall we! And we will not just understand it, but we will also receive it and share it and live it.

"Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" John 12:15 Amen.