

Mark 11:1-10 *When they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples² and told them, "Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you enter it, you will find a young donkey tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here."³ If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here right away."⁴ So they went and found a young donkey outside in the street, tied by a door. They untied it,⁵ and some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the donkey?"⁶ They answered them just as Jesus had said, so they let them go.⁷ Then they brought the donkey to Jesus and threw their robes on it, and He sat on it.⁸ Many people spread their robes on the road, and others spread leafy branches cut from the fields.⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed kept shouting: Hosanna! He who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed One!¹⁰ The coming kingdom of our father David is blessed! Hosanna in the highest heaven.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Holy Week is all about expectations! Your Easter celebration will be as good...or as bad as your expectations. We note this in the people who gathered in Jerusalem to witness the events of what we now call Holy Week. We see a change in atmosphere and attitude from the beginning of the week to the end. Look at the text before us. The mood was festive and the shouts triumphant. The people were celebrating. After all the waiting, all the looking forward, all the anticipation, the Messiah was finally entering triumphantly into Jerusalem as the prophet Zechariah had foretold. The people recognized it instantly. Their king was coming to bring salvation and they couldn't contain themselves. They threw palm branches before him and set their garments on the donkey for him to sit on. People ran before him to announce his coming and behind him to sing his praises. They were full of joy and enthusiasm!

How quickly all of that changed. The people who had shouted so joyfully on Sunday were shouting again on Friday, but they were anything but joyful. "Crucify him! Crucify him!" they shouted on Friday. "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" What had caused this sudden and drastic change in them? What caused them to want to kill the one they had so readily and joyfully proclaimed to be their king? Expectations. They had great expectations for Jesus but he didn't turn out to be the king they expected him to be. They were doing all the right things on Palm Sunday but for all the wrong reasons. Their expectations were for an earthly kingdom. They longed for the earthly peace of David's kingdom and the glory they enjoyed as the most powerful nation of that time. They longed for the destruction of the Romans and a release from the burden of their oppression. They expected a Messiah who would establish a physical kingdom and when Jesus didn't meet their expectations, they were done with him and wanted to get rid of him.

Jesus hadn't come to set up an earthly kingdom. He could have. He could have destroyed the Romans and freed them from oppression. He could have set up a kingdom that wiped out disease and provided free, abundant food for all his people. He could have destroyed every earthly enemy and brought a period of peace and prosperity for Israel. But these were not the biggest problem his people were facing. Their spiritual problem still remained. Had Jesus come to set up an earthly kingdom, his people would have enjoyed peace and prosperity here, but they would still be dying in their sins condemned to face eternity away from God and his joy. Jesus came to fight a spiritual battle. We are reminded of that in the readings from Mark that were before us today. He came to be a spiritual king to rid his people of the problem that plagued them most—the spiritual problem of their sin. So Jesus chose the way of the cross. He chose a road that included suffering and torture. He submitted himself to death and hell to win the battle over sin and free his people to live with him forever. What we see on Palm Sunday is our king willingly going forward to sacrifice himself in battle, deliberately putting himself in harm's way, so that we can be freed of the guilt of our sin and live in heaven forever.

All of this helps us set our expectations for this week. What do we expect to see and hear this week as we gather in God's house? What are our expectations for the Easter holiday just one week away? That's important to ask because many people come to Easter and to Jesus with wrong expectations and find themselves disappointed. As many think about Easter, their expectation is to enjoy family time with immediate and extended family. To others it's all about the Egg hunts for the kids and getting cute pictures as they find their baskets. Some look forward to beach time or to get away for the holiday weekend. All those are good in and of themselves but they are earthly expectations.

Others have wrong expectation as they look to Jesus. Many will come to Jesus with expectations of earthly health and success. They expect that if they believe in him health and success will follow. They have the expectation of physical blessings like luxury and ease. Others have the expectation that following Jesus means there will be no hardships or challenges or sad times or loss. When you look to him as the one who can take away physical problems it is disheartening when those problems continue. It's easy to come to Easter and Jesus with all the wrong expectations and like that crowd

become disappointed and disenchanted. When we focus on the earthly and physical when it comes to Jesus and lose sight of the spiritual, we find ourselves in the same position as that crowd on Good Friday and jeer rather than cheer our king.

So let's set our expectations properly as we enter into Holy Week so that we can celebrate with proper joy as we gather together on Easter Sunday. This is your king we celebrate marching triumphantly into Jerusalem today armed exactly with what he needed to fight the battle he came to fight. That battle is a spiritual battle to attain forgiveness for your sins and conquer death in your place. We confess with St. Paul as he said to Timothy, "*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst* (1 Timothy 1:15)." Perhaps no other week in the Christian church year provides such a sharp reminder to our soul of the real problem that confronts us. As we read through the Passion history of Jesus today and saw him arrested, beaten, tried, tortured and crucified, we are reminded that all of that was done in our place because of our sins. The battle which needed to be fought was one for our souls against the devil himself. Without our King willingly and deliberately going into battle on our behalf, we would have been lost to devil forever, separated from God to spent our eternity in hell.

When we view it from this perspective, what great expectations we have for next Sunday as we gather to celebrate Jesus' victory over death and the devil. Jesus not only fought the spiritual battle that needed to be fought for us, he won the battle, came out victorious and makes that victory ours through faith worked by the Holy Spirit. With those expectations, we have high hopes for this week! We look forward to a great celebration! Watch in wonder and awe this week as you see the battle play out. Be thankful for God's grace and his perfect plan for your salvation. Let your expectations build as you prepare to celebrate the victory over sin, death, and the devil which is yours through faith and which will be yours for all eternity. Behold your King going into battle for you. This is a week of Great Expectations. Amen.