

Lectioary Readings: Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 118:19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon Title: *Expectations Meet Reality*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer.* (Psalm 19:14)

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for Palm Sunday is from our Old Testament Reading: Zechariah, chapter 9.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, have you ever had expectations meet reality? Sure, we all have. Palm Sunday is all about expectations meeting reality.

I. The expectations. Christ's Palm Sunday parade into Jerusalem wasn't the only parade in Jerusalem that year. In the year AD 30, Roman historians record that the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, also had a parade – a parade of Roman cavalry and soldiers that marched into the city of Jerusalem.

From the western side of the city, the opposite side from which Jesus would enter, Pontius Pilate led Roman soldiers on horseback and on foot:

- Each soldier was clad in leather armor polished to a high gloss.
- On each soldiers' head, hammered helmets gleamed in the bright sunlight.
- At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel.
- In their hands, each soldier carried a spear.
- If the soldier was an archer, he carried a bow with a sling of arrows across his back.
- Drummers beat out the cadence of the march.

The purpose of this parade was to show the political peace offered through Roman might and power.

The expectation, then, on Palm Sunday, was that Christ, coming from the opposite side of the city, was going to defeat the Roman legions and offer political peace through Jewish might and power. Therefore, in expectation, the crowd on that Sunday, proclaimed: "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*"

The word "*Hosanna*" is a Hebrew word that means, "*Save us now!*" Therefore, Hosanna was a cry from the people for Jesus to save the Jews from Roman occupation. And so, they expected that Jesus would bring the peace of King David – "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*"

Political peace. That's what people expected on Palm Sunday.

II. Now the reality. In the words of Zechariah: *“Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King will come to you—righteous and saved. Humble and riding upon a donkey; upon a colt, a foal of a donkey”* (v 9).

Let’s unpack this verse today:

- Your King: While Darius the Persian is called *“the king”* (Zechariah 7:1) and Gaza has a *“king”* (Zechariah 9:5), here the Messiah is *“your King.”* Therefore, rejoice and shout aloud because your King comes to earn forgiveness for every sin, direction at every turn, light for every dark day, and an anchor for every deadly storm. This King is too wise to error, too tender to crush and too merciful to ever cast us away.

Behold your King!

- Righteous: Your King is *“righteous”* which here means *“success”* and *“victory.”* Righteous also announces that this is an authentic King. Victorious and righteous kings during Israel’s history didn’t always carry out their kingship as they were so anointed. This is a fact often pointed out by prophets:
 - All nineteen kings of the northern kingdom were apostates.
 - In the southern kingdom, twelve out of twenty were evil.

Behold your King comes to you, righteous!

- Saved: Zechariah goes on to describe the coming King with the word *“saved.”* That strikes us as strange. The King needs to be saved? What’s going on? The LORD called Israelite kings to be passive. Therefore, those kings were to be dependent on the LORD alone for victory.

The passive idea parallels with Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song. There are fifteen passive verbs which describe the Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:13 in detail. We find that especially in chapter 53, describing the Servant’s dependence on His heavenly Father, leading up to His crucifixion:

- *“He was despised”* (53:2).
- *“He was wounded ... He was crushed”* (53:5).
- *“He was oppressed ... He was afflicted”* (53:7).
- *“He was taken away ... He was cut off”* (53:8).
- *“He was numbered”* (53:12).

Behold your King comes to you, righteous and being saved!

- Riding on a Donkey: In the ancient Near East, horses and chariots brought victory on the battlefield, not donkeys! In 2 Kings 2:12 and 13:14 horses and chariots are proverbial for ultimate power. However, this King rides into Jerusalem on a *donkey*. Not a warhorse, not a stallion. He has no chariots, no army, no sword, no helmet and no spear.

Behold your King comes to you, righteous and being saved, riding on a donkey!

III. So, what kind of peace does Jesus bring?

- Zechariah says in 11:12 that the King will be sold for 30 pieces of silver.
- Zechariah says in 12:10 that the King will be pierced through with a spear and die.
- Zechariah says in 13:7 that the King will be struck and the sheep will scatter.

This is hardly the kind of peace people wanted!

No wonder people – by and large – didn’t receive Jesus! By Friday Jesus was hanging under a sign indicating why Rome executed Him: *“This is Jesus, the King of the Jews”* (Matthew 27:37).

You see, looking for a king who had pomp and power, the people missed something. They missed seeing that God offers a lasting, a much more enduring peace, through the King who is righteous and being saved, riding on a donkey!

But get this! In a great reversal:

- God turned the darkness of Good Friday into the light of Easter.
- God turned death with great suffering into an empty tomb with great joy.
- God turned the shadow of the cross into *shalom* – real peace – for all people.

In the words of Zechariah: *“And I will cut off chariots from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the bow of warfare will be cut off. And He will speak peace (shalom) to the nations. And His rule will be from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth”* (v 10).

This is the kind of peace we all need! Why is that? Life often looks like a thousand threads on a table. There is no rhyme or reason. Stuff happens. It all seems so random.

However, Christ’s gift of shalom/peace:

- Brings order out of chaos.
- Brings goodness out of tragedy.
- Brings hope out of despair.

You see, shalom puts life’s broken pieces back together again. Zechariah says: *“He will speak peace (shalom) to the nations.”* Yes, that’s Jesus speaking shalom to you.

“Behold, your King comes to you, righteous and saved, riding on a donkey and delivering shalom!” The angels sang about this shalom when Christ was born (Luke 2:14) and shalom is what Jesus gave His disciples just before He died (John 14:27).

For the Savior’s shed blood makes shalom so that the baptized have shalom *with* God (Romans 5:1). As well as, the shalom *of* God that guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). How does God deliver His shalom? God delivers shalom in concrete ways in specific places:

- In the Gospel proclaimed.
- In Holy Baptism.
- And in the Lord’s Supper.

You see, through Word and Sacrament God begins to weave broken lives back together again. Therefore, Christ delivers peace that endures. On the other hand, Pontius Pilate, leading a parade of soldiers into Jerusalem offers *Pax Romana* – Roman political peace. On Palm Sunday, many thought Jesus paraded into Jerusalem to defeat *Pax Romana*.

Therefore, expectations meet reality. Did they ever!

- Judas betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver.
- Peter used a sword in Gethsemane to strike the high priest's servant.
- All the disciples abandoned the Savior.
- Finally, by Friday, most of the Jews ended up rejecting Jesus, crying: "*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*"

They wanted a different Savior!

For illustration purposes, a dad took two of his children, his five-year-old daughter and three-year-old son, to buy a bike for the daughter. She picked out a shiny blue bike with a banana seat and training wheels. The son also decided it was time for him to have a bike as well. The dad explained to him that he was still having problems riding his trike. That a big-kid's bike would bring him more pain than pleasure.

The dad further explained that the day would certainly come when he would buy him a two-wheel bike – just not today. The son looked up to his dad and asked: "*Then I don't get a different bike?*" The dad responded: "*That's right son, not today. You don't get a different bike.*" Then the son said at the top of his lungs: "*Then I want a different daddy!*"

Let's face it. There are times when we want a different Savior. A Savior Who can instantly right our wrongs, heal our hurts and miraculously deliver us from disease, depression and all sorts of doom and gloom.

Again, expectations meet reality:

- The reality is that Jesus suffers 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.

Conclusion: You see, dear friends in Christ, there is so much we don't have – yet. But there is so much more that we do have – now! "*Behold, your King comes to you, righteous and saved, riding on a donkey and delivering shalom (peace)!*"

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!