

# Expectations: The Good and the Bad

## Palm Sunday

Mark 11:1-11  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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March 29, 2015

Of all the many themes presented in the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we call Palm Sunday, I find myself returning time and time again to the issue of expectations. Let's talk about **expectations**. We all have them – about almost everything and everyone. In today's context, however, I'm not referring to expectations as those things we look forward to, but rather to the duties and standards that we set for something or someone, including ourselves, to live up to.

It may help from time to time to evaluate, reflect upon, and perhaps even list the things that we expect. For example, parents have certain expectations of their children, just as children have particular expectations of their parents – both when young and as adults. We have expectations of a spouse or partner, and of those we call our friends and family, whether biological or chosen. Teachers rightfully have expectations of their students, and visa versa. Studies have revealed that more times than not students will live up to the expectations of their teachers – and that includes low expectations as well as high. Our employer has expectations of us, just as employees have expectations of their employers. We have expectations of our government officials, unfortunately at the moment, however, at an all-time low – and it looks like many are living up to those low expectations. We even have expectations of our favorite sports teams, favorite entertainers, favorite authors, and favorite artists. When we get ill we have expectations of our doctors and nurses, the medical profession, and of the medication we take. We have expectations of the fancy electronic gizmos that we buy to keep us organized and entertained and connected with the world around us. And the list goes on and on.

As a general rule, **what kind of expectations do you usually place on others? Too low or too high? Fair or unfair? Realistic or unrealistic? What kind of expectations do you place on yourself?** That leads to the really big question: **What happens when you or others don't meet or live up to your expectations?** Psychologists believe that many of the expectations we have are actually subconscious - we're not always aware of the kind and level of expectations we have placed upon others and ourselves. And unconscious expectations, especially of a loved one, almost always, sooner or later, lead to frustration and conflict, sometimes to the point of bitterness and resentment. So when we become frustrated with someone, including ourselves, it is crucial that we **explore and identify our unmet expectations. Only then can we evaluate whether or not it is realistic and fair to that person and ourselves. Therefore, dialogue and communication are vital, for that's the only way we can let others know what we expect of them and they of us.** We often forget that others aren't as good at mind

reading as we would like them to be. This can make our unspoken or unwritten expectations of others a very real stumbling block in our relationships.

We can certainly extend all of this to our personal and community journey of faith as well. As a congregation, for example, you have expectations of our church's many programs. And you rightfully have expectations of me as your pastor. I certainly have expectations of myself as you pastor. Unfortunately, many **pastors** have expectations of themselves that can be quite **unhealthy**, including:

- no days off
- be all things to all people
- be available anywhere at anytime
- meet everyone's needs
- be above being hurt
- walk on water
- be a miracle worker
- be spiritually perfect
- never say 'no'
- and it never hurts, of course, to be a good electrician, plumber, and janitor.

I am deeply grateful that College Hill has not gotten trapped into these unhealthy expectations, even if I do of myself on occasion. Saying that, in return, as a pastor I have expectations of our church leaders, as well as expectations of all of you as members of this congregation. And I know that we both expectations for the 6-week sabbatical that I have been offered, starting one month from now. How well do we express our mutual expectations with each other?

Well, I'm sharing all of this with you this morning to make an important point. **There's not one of us who isn't daily bombarded with external and internal, conscious and unconscious, met and unmet expectations. How we deal with these expectations will determine, to a large degree, our ability to cope with life: our jobs, our church, and especially our relationships.**

Just ask Jesus how things went with him in connection with the unmet expectations that the crowds in Jerusalem had of him. You know the story well, we call it Holy Week. It begins with Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover and ended with his execution. According to all four gospel accounts, the crowd in the story played a major role as a character in the unfolding drama.

The Jewish people, according to some historians, had become intensely nationalistic and, understandably, had a strong desire for political and religious independence. The people who shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!," were cheering, according to the gospel writer Mark, the person they believed would become their long-expected king – hence Mark's reference to David. That was their overall expectation of a messiah.

According to Mark, the crowd's expectation was that Jesus was the one who would take political power and thus drive out the Romans. And since they believed this person came in the name of the Lord, this triumphal entry was seen as **a religious event as well as a political one**. Needless to say, they had great expectations, and that's when and where the trouble begins. Within a short five-day period of time, the crowd who joyously shouted, "Hosanna!" would scream out, "Crucify him!" It became obvious

to them that this “King of the Jews” was not the kind of king they had expected. This humble and gentle man, who talked about a new kingdom, marked by love and forgiveness, did not meet their militaristic and political expectations of a powerful messiah.

So one of the primary purposes of this story, then and now, is to **look at that potential in each one of us that would lead us to shout, “Hosanna” in one breath, then scream out, “Crucify” in the next, when our expectations aren’t met.**

**Jesus made it necessary for people to redefine their definition and expectations of a Savior and Messiah, of what it meant to be the Christ. Perhaps we need to do the same today.** And just as Jesus didn't conform to what most expected of him, **God doesn't seem to conform to many of our expectations, either.** Biblical commentator Larry Broding asks:

What do we expect from God? Do we want to follow God, whatever that might entail? Or, do we want God just to fix us? Have we confused faith with expectation? Faith puts God in charge. Expectation puts us in charge. Faith allows God to surprise us. Expectation does not.

So in relation to today's Gospel reading on this Palm Sunday, let me leave you with some questions for you to ponder during Holy Week.

- **What are your expectations of others, especially of those you love?**
- **What are your expectations of yourself?**
- **What are your expectations of this Jesus, this one we call the Christ?**
- **What are your expectations of God?**

Perhaps as this week progresses toward Good Friday, **we just may find that an adjustment of our own expectations may be in order.**

Amen.