

**April 10, 2022**

**John 12:12-19**

**Hosannas Turn to Crucify Him**

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Over the years, I have learned that one of the things that makes good leaders good is that they are skilled at managing expectations. They communicate clearly what they expect and what others can expect from them. This helps the people around them manage their own expectations. In human resources surveys, employees report higher job satisfaction when they have clarity around what is expected of them and when they can consistently predict what they can expect of their employer. They report having a better work-home life balance and they stay at jobs longer. Expectations are good and necessary.

The trouble we get into with expectations is that sometimes our expectations are unrealistic. And when they are, we get disappointed or even mad, and it really isn't the other person's fault. The problem is the expectations themselves because they are sometimes unrealistic, often uncommunicated, and misplaced. Managing expectations in healthy ways is a learned skill and it is hard work in all areas of our lives, including in our homes.

I have two grown sons. They are both amazing. One of them, Christopher, is a lot like me. We see the world in pretty much the same way, and we agree on most of the important things in life. Like me, when he was a student, he would do whatever it took to get an A. Earning the A was the goal. That is what mattered. Tell us what to do to get an A and that's what Christopher and I will do. Side note: when I told Christopher yesterday that I was telling this story today, he said, I didn't care about the grade, mom, I didn't want to disappoint you.

Well, seven years after Christopher was born, Andrew came along. Andrew sees the world differently from his brother and me. I learned quickly when Andrew started school that grades were not a motivator and, it turns out, not wanting to disappoint me was not a motivator either. Andrew cared about expediency. In his mind, once he learned something and demonstrated he knew the concept, it was time to move on. Assignments he decided were "busy work" were the bane of his existence.

I got a taste of this for the first time when he was in second grade. His class was learning how to carry and borrow when adding and subtracting two-digit numbers. Andrew was very good at math. In fact, the summer before second grade, we had been somewhere that required us to sit and wait for a while, and to keep Andrew occupied I taught him how to carry and borrow. He loved it and soon was adding and subtracting numbers much larger than two-digit numbers.

By the time his class learned carrying and borrowing, he had been doing it for a while, and had stopped crossing out the numbers when he borrowed or writing in what he was carrying. He could do it all in his head, which he took great pride in. Well, the worksheets his teacher gave him for homework had bubbles above the numbers and the students were supposed to fill in the bubbles with the numbers being carried or borrowed. Andrew did the work in his head, so he didn't fill in the bubbles.

He got his homework paper back and all the problems were marked wrong, with a note, "fill in the bubbles." When he showed it to me, I said, "All of your answers are right. You just need to fill in the bubbles." "I don't need the bubbles," he said. "I know," I said, "but your teacher wants you to use them." "I am not doing that," Andrew said, "It's for babies." He really dug his heels in, but honestly, I thought the unpleasantness of another homework assignment that was marked all wrong would be enough to snap him out of it. He came home the next night with another math paper, and again, all the problems were wrong. And again, there was a note, "fill in the bubbles," from his teacher. This time the note had an explanation mark after it.

I changed my tactics that night. I busted this out, "Andrew, I am so disappointed that you have chosen not to follow the directions." Andrew looked me square in the eye and said, "You being disappointed sounds like a 'you thing,' not a 'me thing.' I am not filling in the bubbles. It is stupid to expect people to use them if they don't need them. That's what disappoints me." He was 7. From that point on, I knew that expecting Andrew to be like me or like his brother when it came to academics was unrealistic. He was not going to fill in the bubbles, do the extra credit, or create a colorful, neat, "go the extra mile" poster. He would do the math in his head, settle for the B, and turn in posters with only the necessary information, no muss, no fuss. I adjusted my expectations and also resisted the urge to color his posters for him.

Expectations. The story of Palm Sunday and Jesus's entry into Jerusalem is a story about expectations. The crowd gathered that day had big expectations. The question before us right now is, "Would Jesus be what and who they expected?"

This is John 12:12-19:

<sup>12</sup> The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—  
the King of Israel!"

<sup>14</sup> Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

<sup>15</sup> "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey's colt!"

<sup>16</sup> His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. <sup>17</sup> So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. <sup>18</sup> It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. <sup>19</sup> The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"

This part of the narrative is situated shortly after the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. One of the differences between the Gospel of John and the other three gospels is that, in John, the story of Lazarus is the final straw, it is the event that seals the deal as far as the religious leaders are concerned. The author of John wrote, "...from that day on, they planned to put him to death." Having seen Lazarus walk out of the tomb, thanks to Jesus, the Jewish leaders decided he was dangerous to all of them. His actions and the stir he created, was going to cause problems with the Romans and that wouldn't be good for anyone.

In the other gospels, though, the final straw comes after Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. It is the story of his disruption in the temple that screams "danger, danger," to the religious leaders. But in John, Jesus was in and out of Jerusalem several times throughout the story. He disrupted the temple in the Gospel of John

way back in chapter two. A lot has happened since then. My point is that in John's narrative, Jesus's entry into Jerusalem this last time seems even more dangerous, more "in your face." He was a wanted man, and he knew it and made quite a spectacle of himself anyway.

As Jesus rode in that day, the crowd that lined the street, waving their palm branches, were filled with hopeful expectation. They shouted, "'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!" You see, every Jewish person in Jerusalem in the first century wanted the Messiah to come, even the ones who were not a fan of Jesus. They wanted a king---a real king, not like Herod. They imagined he would be a warrior; he would combine spiritual power with military might, like King David. Having raised Lazarus from the dead, the people waving palms that day thought Jesus could very well be their guy, the long-awaited Messiah. There they were, on one of the holiest days of the year, in the religious and political capital of their nation, filled with anticipation, shouting, "Save us!" The crowd wanted Jesus to be their king and they expected him to be *their* kind of king.

You know what it's like to wait for the parade to come by. You step out into the street to see if you can see anyone coming. I bet the people waiting for Jesus to come by were doing the same thing. They couldn't wait to see their mighty king process into the city. But wait...what's that they saw? Is *that* Jesus? They were squinting because they couldn't believe what their eyes were seeing. On what was he riding? It is not a big, powerful war horse. It's a donkey. What kind of a king rides in on a donkey? As he passed by, I imagine the people waving their palm branches more vehemently, shouting, "Hosanna," even louder and more convincingly. Like, "Everything is fine. The fact that our king is on an ass is just fine. There is absolutely nothing out of the ordinary to see here."

But there was. The crowd wanted Jesus to be a certain kind of king. They expected something more in line with the Roman processions they had witnessed many times; full displays of imperial power---men on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles. The people could hear them coming from far off, the sounds of marching feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. Strutting their stuff, the Roman empire paraded through town, the oppressors reminding the people of the greatness of their military might.

It was as if Jesus was poking fun at their toxic-ly masculine displays. That kind of greatness, if you can call it that, was not what Jesus was about. Greatness defined through the lens of God, you see, is not measured by wars won, land occupied, strength shown through domination, or wealth. It is found in the things Jesus spent time talking about and doing: compassionate service, creating community and belonging, and practicing courage by speaking truth to oppressive powers and loving the ones who have been kept on the outside.

Some of the crowd gathered undoubtedly expected him to be more like a magician (poof! you're healed) or miracle-worker, others expected him to be a revolutionary and overthrow the government. Certainly, no one waving palm branches that day expected Jesus to go without a fight to his death. Their expectations of Jesus seem ridiculous to us. Of course, Jesus was not that kind of king. But what about our own expectations?

2000 years later, we still expect Jesus to be what and who he was not. Jesus was not white. Jesus was not Christian. Jesus was not American. He was not concerned with 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights or which team won the national championship. Jesus spent zero time condemning loving, consensual, same-sex relationships. Jesus was political, but not partisan. He was not a republican or democrat. Jesus was not a soldier or a magician. One scholar I read this week described him this way, Jesus was a "healer-weirdo, mama's boy, dreamer, napper, feeder, lover, dead-raiser, long winded pray-er...who owned nothing and came from sleepy doe-eyed Nazareth, who seemed more reckless than brave and more like a weak-kneed kid than a burly shepherd..."

It's hard to imagine, but that is the person the protectors of the Jewish faith and political leaders saw as a threat. And the irony of the whole thing is that by the time the author of the Gospel of John wrote his version of the Jesus stories, 65-75 years after Jesus's death, exactly what Jesus was killed to prevent, had already come to pass. The Jerusalem Temple was destroyed and there was full on war. Violence never brings lasting peace, and that is true for the violence of the cross as well.

Jesus was not the kind of Rambo king the people expected. He was a man who was more interested in being what God wanted him to be than what people

expected him to be. And it is that man we will follow this week as he prays hard for his friends, as he is arrested and beaten, sentenced to death, and as he dies a cruel, violent death. I wonder, as we follow him this week, if we might consider the ways in which we choose to be who other people expect us to be, rather than who God expects us to be.

Because here is the truth...people are fickle. If we are living our lives trying to be who other people think we should be, we will always fail miserably. Not only will we not fully live into who we were created to be, but people change their minds all the time and different people want us to be different things. Even here, in the stories of Jesus's final days, we will read about how the shouts of "Hosanna," by the parade crowd will turn to a different crowd's shouts of "Crucify him." To all of those people, the ones who loved him and the ones who were afraid of him, Jesus's actions seemed to say, "You don't get to tell me who I am. God tells me who I am. And I am God's beloved. And by the way, you are too."

It will be hard to hear the stories of this week; it always is. We will want to brush past it and get right to next Sunday. But let's not. Let's sit in the uncomfortable space between Hosanna and Crucify him, grateful for the hope of what happens next. Amen.