

**Love Incarnate**  
**Mark 11:1-11**  
**March 24, 2024 - Palm Sunday**  
**Rev. Laurie Crelly, East Church**  
**Grand Rapids MI**

Stacie Huckeba, a famous photographer and film director shared that while doing a photo shoot with Dolly Parton for an album cover, she instructed Dolly to be herself and Dolly responded, “Oh honey, being Dolly Parton is easy. Being the Dolly Parton, everyone expects me to be. That’s the hard part.”

That is a profound quote. “It is easy being Dolly Parton. But being the Dolly Parton, everyone expects me to be. That’s the hard part.”

I wonder how many of us can relate to that quote. We may find it easy being ourselves, but it is hard living up to the expectations of others.

People put such high hopes and expectations on others, especially leaders, famous people, and celebrities, it can bring a lot of stress with those expectations. What happens when you don’t live up to those expectations or worse yet, what happens if those expectations are not who you are?

Jesus himself even asked at one point “who do people say that I am?” Did Jesus also feel the pressure to be what others expected him to be? For us, what expectations do we put on Jesus still today?

As we come to the final week of Lent and our Journey to Jerusalem what kind of Jesus are you looking for? What kind of Jesus were the people hoping for?

We know today as Palm Sunday, but scripture calls it Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Let’s imagine for a moment what this might have looked

like, sounded like and what people may have been hoping to find in Jesus, this popular and a bit controversial healer, prophet, rabbi, or maybe even the long-awaited Messiah.

Today's reading has the people lining the path with their cloaks, branches, and leaves. Was it a victory parade? Is Jesus seen as a celebrity of sorts? Or is it a demonstration march? People chanting slogans and demanding change and Jesus is seen as their leader for a revolution. Or is it a protest, maybe seen as threatening or bordering on a riot? What kind of a march have the people turned out for?

Some scholars and preachers think that it was a type of mockery protest. Rev. Dr. Chris Perry Adjunct professor at Asbury Theological Seminary sets the scene this way,

“It was the standard practice of the Roman governors of Judea to be in Jerusalem during major festivals, not because they cared about their Jewish subjects, but to handle business in case of trouble. Pilate normally lived in Caesarea Maritima (Caesarea on the Sea) but he had brought his soldiers in to reinforce the Fortress Antonia. Pilate's military procession was a demonstration of both Roman imperial power and imperial theology. Jesus entered the city from the east, riding down from the Mount of Olives out of Bethany. But, on the western side of the city Pontius Pilate rode into the city in full procession, riding a horse at the head of Roman imperial cavalry and soldiers. Pilate entered the city proclaiming the power of the Empire. Jesus' procession proclaimed the Kingdom of God, riding an untamed donkey.”

This paints a stark contrasting image between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God that Jesus is proclaiming. Human rulers are seen on strong, regal white horses surrounded by strong, well-armed militias who use intimidation and fear to keep the peace. They demand unquestioning loyalty and obedience. This kind of king the people have known and seen for centuries. They have been conquered and subjugated by one empire after another throughout the centuries. They long for their freedom and cry out for the long-promised Messiah. The people are about to celebrate the greatest liberation of the people of Israel by the hand of God, deliverance from Egypt. So, to deter any dreams of a new deliverer the Emperor is showing force to remind the people what they are up against.

The crowd that is forming along the roadside have all these dreams and images shaping their expectations. Some may have heard that Jesus' is of the lineage of King David, so they are expecting Jesus to be this big strong warrior like King David who slayed Goliath. Others have had heard the stories of Jesus walking on water and feeding the five thousand. They are seeking a Moses or Elijah that can harness the power of the natural world and rain down fire to punish the enemies of God.

What kind of Jesus are they expecting to see as they line the road singing the songs of deliverance. "Hosanna, hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of our God." Watching and waiting and they finally see this man struggling to ride an untamed donkey. Not a majestic stallion draped in regalia, but a donkey covered in peasants' cloaks. Where is his army? It is some fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot and a mix of ordinary men and women from the back country of Galilee. Following along singing and dancing about God's unfailing love.

What kind of Messiah were they expecting and what did they see? Who is Jesus to them? Who is Jesus to you and to me?

This Jesus says we are to “love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.” This Jesus says, “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life.” This Jesus that says, “Turn the other cheek, and forgive even your enemies.”

This Jesus says, “tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in three days.” For the stone that the builders have rejected has become the cornerstone.

Jesus enters Jerusalem in stark contrast to the kingdoms of this world entering on the other side of Jerusalem as if to say, “chose this day whom you will follow.” Each of us, like the throngs on that day, are standing on the side of the road cheering for what we expect in a Messiah, and we see Jesus.

Do we drop our palms and walk away? Confused and dismayed because we cannot accept that this is truly the one “Who is coming in the name of the Lord.”

Or do we continue to shout and wave our palms, following behind Jesus shouting, “Hosanna, Hosanna, Save us, save us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of our Lord.” Even as we see the cross looming on the horizon.