

Reflection April 13, 2025

Psalm 118: 19-29

Luke 19: 28-40

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Title: What are we expecting?

Prayer: Loving God, we come to you now ready, with ears and hearts open to hear once more your invitation to return to you. Amen.

Here we have the Triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem ... on the back of a colt with the cloaks of his followers spread on the path in front of him. No huge army, no fanfare, no guards to keep him safe, no royal fabrics and colours. Not really a typical king's triumphal entry; but a triumphal entry in a Jesus kind of way.

And I imagine there was great expectation in the air: Here he comes, he's going to topple the establishment, he's going to get us what we deserve, he's going to bring back the power to our side, he's going to be King and everything – for us – is going to be good again.

This Kingdom of God he's been promising is sure going to be great!

High expectations indeed.

And, what happens?

Jesus enters Jerusalem and nothing. In fact, worse than nothing. Within the week he's arrested, tried and crucified.

Some triumphal entry.

And, yet, here they were lining the side of the path shouting their Hosannas. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

And, as we lay our burden palms down earlier we sang our Hosannas too. A word that brings both joy and sorrow. Just like this day.

The word Hosanna has both Hebrew and Greek roots. Originally it was used as a word to request help from God ... "Save! Please!" Over time it became used as a form of adoration and praise ... "Salvation! Thank you!" In our readings today we hear both used.

In the psalm people use their Hosannas as a request to be saved; and in the gospel of Luke, and the other gospels, people use their Hosannas as a sign of hope, adoration and praise.

It's fitting that today the word means both. Because today we are so excited and full of anticipation that Jesus is finally going to take over, be in charge, be the king we know him to be. Hosanna in the highest!!! We are going to be saved!!!

However, we know, too, that soon the reality will set in, and the earthly power the followers were expecting will not show up. Much to their surprise and sadness Jesus doesn't appear to be a match for the Roman power structure. How disappointing. Those who didn't flee may have stayed with their shrivelling palm branch, their loud exclamations of Hosanna changing to mere wimperings of Hosanna.

What a mixed emotion day.

But, let not your heart be troubled! I love how scripture gives us clues to uncover. The passage in Luke that Janie read starts with "After he had said this..."

Hold up. What exactly did Jesus say?

Prior to today's passage Jesus tells the parable of the 10 pounds. This is the last parable he tells them. They were getting so close to Jerusalem and time was running out.

The parable is about an unruly leader who no one likes but who gains authority anyway. While he's away he gives 10 servants 10 pounds (and the implication is that they better make him some more money with it). The ones who make this ruler money gain positions in his new governing body. The ones who don't make him money, or who, as an act of protest, intentionally don't even try to make him money, get killed in front of everyone.

Why is it important to know about this parable on Palm Sunday? Because Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom of God. He's giving these followers some clues before they make their final entrance into Jerusalem. He's showing them and us where the real power lies.

If this parable sunk in, people would see that taking something by force is not the way of God, can compromise people's agency and injure the most vulnerable. If they could grasp this maybe when they got to Jerusalem and things unfolded differently than they anticipated, they would have the memory of this parable to fall back on and trust in the power of God's kingdom.

Maybe when Jesus entered Jerusalem and turned the tables in the Temple instead of taking the city by force; his followers could have stayed with him; could have continued believing. They maybe could have helped Jesus teach others about how the Kingdom of God was so different than what they were used to. That it was a kingdom not based on power but on vulnerability. A kingdom not based on judgment but on mercy. A kingdom not held together with mighty force but flourishing with love.

So, what does all this have to do with us today?

Jesus' followers were looking for a saviour and the only example they knew was a King who would claim power by force.

We are hoping for a saviour now – someone who will take us out of the mess we are in.

Our default thinking is “Who is going to be the next HUMAN who can do this?” And, “what kind of economic or political force are they going to have to use to accomplish it?”

This comparison helps us understand those early followers – we can understand how they would have been disappointed when upon arriving in Jerusalem none of their problems were solved.

So, for us, what are we expecting today in April of 2025, a week before Easter? And will we be disappointed if we let ourselves expect anything?

We waved our palms, we said our hosannas, we adorned the path with our burdens. Any minute now Jesus is going to walk along this path – our path – and enter our lives in this time of political turmoil, societal collapse, hatred, upheaval, conniving, economic power and destruction.

What the stories of our faith tell us is that this new kingdom won't be what we expect.

Some of us will be disappointed, some of us will flee, some of us will deny, and some of us will turn against Jesus.

I found it hard to articulate what I expected of this Palm Sunday, of this triumphal entry. In part because I didn't want to have any expectations; because I didn't want to be disappointed. If it all stays kind of dream-like then I can't watch anything concrete crumble.

But I forced myself to think about it...

What do I expect?

I have high expectations – I expect that the more I follow Jesus, and the more I open my heart to him, and the more vulnerable I can allow myself to be – with Jesus and with the Christ in everyone around me – then the more I will be living in the kingdom of God right now.

If I'm living in the kingdom of God then my ignorant belief that I am solely in control of my life, that it's up to me to run my life, that I am powerful will be replaced with the truth that God has a hold of my life, that my job is to follow the path of God's love wherever it leads, and that God's energy is what powers my life.

I will choose to be confident in these high expectations because with God anything is possible. So if I can change the balance of that life-force energy – focusing more on the energy from God's side of the scale – then I end up not looking for the next earthly political power to save me, because I know I, along with all creation, have already been saved by the eternal outpouring of God's enduring love.

We just have to get out of its way!

These last five weeks when we have laid our pebble on the cairn, and today when we threw our palms to the ground in great joy of Jesus' arrival – how are we changed? What are we looking for? What do we expect?

We expect help. We expect that because we have trusted God enough to commend our precious burdens to her, that she will act. In God's own time. A Kairos time that lives alongside of us, a time we sometimes sense but rarely comprehend. Hopefully we have caught enough glimpses of it over time that we can trust it's there and believe that action will happen.

We don't know how laying down these burdens this Lent will change things, but we know it will have some kind of effect, because it is one surrender we have made to God, it is one step on the path of vulnerability, one moment in time when we have opened ourselves to the kingdom of God.

For the followers of Jesus who lined the path and shouted Hosanna with great joy and anticipation it must have been so utterly disappointing that upon reaching Jerusalem nothing that they expected happened. Jesus didn't become King. He didn't take over right away making rules that favoured these faithful people who put their trust in him. In fact the opposite happened – he got arrested and killed.

But, here's what I started thinking about ... while they were with him they were already living in the kingdom of God – they witnessed the benefits of vulnerability over power, mercy over judgment, love over force. They had a taste of it. They lived in that Kairos time. They already knew what the kingdom of God was like.

And so do we.

The work now is to keep living there, keep alleviating the pain of those who suffer, keep feeding those who are hungry, keep clothing those who are cold, keep practicing an open heart when the world wants to shut it down, keep praying, keep trusting that God's love endures forever, keep returning to the table where all are fed, loved and known.

We have evidence through the long journey Jesus took to the cross that living in the kingdom of God within the earthly kingdom of power is possible.

Whether our hosannas are requests for saving or exclamations of praise, God is with us and we are not alone. It is not just up to us. And to maintain our high expectations, we must make room for the power of God to be at work.

As we move into Holy week, let's take one step at a time along the path of Jesus. Let's follow where he goes knowing we are never alone, and that with each step we can choose to live in the kingdom of God.

Amen.