

John 12: 12-16 Palm Sunday 13th April 2025

Prayer: Lord, may we be led by your Spirit this morning to worship and follow you as our Messiah and King. Amen.

In a few short weeks we will be voting in a federal election. Crowds will gather around the candidates as they step out to speak and garner support. Do you have great expectations for the new government? Hoping that they will fulfil the promises made during their campaign? Will the crowds turn away if their expectations are not met, and have the leader flogged for not doing what they wanted??

The crowds came out to hail Jesus as Messiah and King as he entered Jerusalem, just before the Passover Festival. They had great expectations of him.

John says it was the 'next day' that the crowds who had come for the festival came out to meet him. The 'next day' was the day after Jesus had been anointed with expensive perfume by Mary. He had been for dinner with his disciples at her house with her brother Lazarus, who he recently raised from the dead, and sister Martha. The anointing of perfume said Jesus, was preparation for his burial.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, great crowds tried to follow him, and the Pharisees and Chief Priests plotted to arrest and kill him. So, Jesus with his disciples withdrew to the wilderness. But the time was coming, as we heard last week, for Jesus to be glorified, to complete his mission. So, 6 days before the Passover Jesus returned to Bethany to dine with his friends, he is anointed for burial and then he journeys to Jerusalem for the festival. Jesus goes to give his life, knowing that he will be sacrificed as the perfect Passover lamb.

Crowds who had heard about the raising of Lazarus, hear that he is back in town and they gather. Thousands of them, from near and far.

It was the day after the dinner and anointing for burial that Jesus journeys into Jerusalem for the festival. Bethany is about 3 km from the city. He rides in on a colt of a donkey to adulation, little do they know he rides in to meet his death. Not to meet their expectations.

The crowds go to meet him with palm branches, shouting;

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"

All four gospels record Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but John's is the only one that specifically mentions palm branches. The others say that the crowds placed their cloaks and branches they had cut from the fields on the path. Two centuries before Christ, Judas and Simon Maccabaeus had driven the Syrian forces out of Israel. Their victory was celebrated with music and the waving of palm branches. Thus, the palm branches were a symbol of Jewish nationalism and of victory of their enemies. The crowds who were shouting praises to

Jesus, were expecting that Jesus was the Messiah who would free them from Roman domination.

Their cries of “*hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*” comes directly from psalm 118 we heard read this morning. The addition of “*Blessed is the King of Israel!*” show that the crowd understood that Psalm 118 is referring to the Messianic King.

Their expectations of Jesus were misplaced. They praised him for what they expected he would do next. They had heard of or been witnesses to his miracles, walking on water, feeding thousands, healing many and just recently the raising of Lazarus from the dead. There was nothing, they thought, this man could not do. He must be the Messiah.

They were right in recognizing him as the Messiah. But they were wrong in their expectations. They were wrong in their understanding of scripture. They were wrong in what they put their hopes in. The fulfilment of their expectations would only bring temporary peace for Israel. They didn’t understand that Jesus came to offer so much more.

We read that even the disciples didn’t understand all this either. Even though Jesus had been teaching them that he was going to suffer and die and then rise again. The disciples understood this only after he was glorified. After he had died, risen, and appeared to them.

When the crowd cried out “*Hosanna*”, they were calling on Jesus to save them. He didn’t do it the way they were expecting, but *save them*, is exactly what Jesus went on to do through his sacrificial death and resurrection. Jesus defeated sin and death so that all might be saved through him.

It was because he didn’t fulfil their expectations that in a matter of days, the crowd who had worshipped him, turned on him, shouting for him to be crucified.

Were there expectations grounded in what Jesus promised? Were they right to be angry with him?

In his three years of teaching and performing miracles, signs that showed he was the Messiah, never once did Jesus claim that he had come to overthrow the Roman occupation and be King over an earthly Israel.

Jesus taught about God’s Kingdom; a Kingdom so much bigger than just Israel. He turned expectations upside down. He told people to love their enemies, to turn the other cheek, he said blessed are the peacemakers. He did not come for an earthly war. He had come to defeat sin and death, in a most unexpected way.

He came as the suffering servant as Isaiah prophesied. If only the religious leaders and the crowds understood the prophesies, they might have had different expectations of Jesus, the Messiah.

Jesus didn't ever promise to deliver what they were looking for.

Even on that 'triumphal entry', did he come riding on a white stallion, that would have signified a conquering King ready for battle? No, he came in humility, riding on a colt of a donkey. Jesus was enacting a prophesy from Zechariah 9:9. Jesus was confirming that he was Israel's King, but not the kind they were looking for.

He was bringing a different kind of peace and salvation. In his first coming Jesus arrived as a vulnerable baby and went on to suffer humiliation of death on a cross, offering himself as the perfect Passover lamb, sacrificing himself for us. He taught that anyone who believed in him, who looked on him as he was exalted and glorified – both on the cross and in his resurrection – that they would be saved. They would have new life for now and eternity.

It is in his second coming, writes John in Revelation 19, that Jesus will come riding on a white horse bringing justice and defeating all evil.

What are our expectations of Jesus?

Why do we follow Jesus?

Like the crowds, is it for any temporal benefits we think he might give us? If that is the case, we will be disappointed and, like the crowds, be tempted to turn away from him. There are those who expect Jesus will bring financial prosperity if they follow him, or a life free of suffering, or that he will answer every prayer of healing or provide us with a car park when we want one.

Jesus may bless us with many good things, that might include financial security, good health and he may even open up the occasional car space when needed – but they are not the things he has promised. So, we should not be disappointed and turn away from him when they don't happen.

If you read the gospels, you will know that to follow Jesus, he says we are to pick up our cross and deny ourselves. That we may suffer for being a Christian, that people will persecute us. He never promises that life is going to be easy!

But he also says he came to give his life so that we may have abundant life, he says that when we are thirsty, he will refresh us with his life-giving water. He says when we are weary and burdened, we should go to him, and he will give us rest. He promises the Holy Spirit to be our comforter, counselor, and guide. He offers us eternal life.

We may have other expectations of Jesus. We may wonder why he hasn't stopped all the suffering in the world; from wars, from natural disasters from hate and greed. Jesus didn't promise this in his first coming. But he does ask us to be his agents on earth, bringing peace

and working for justice. And he does promise to conquer evil and bring peace and justice for all when he returns at his second coming.

Our adulation of Jesus should not be based on false expectations like the crowds that gathered as he rode into Jerusalem. They rightly hailed him as Messiah, but he was not the kind of Messiah they were hoping for. We should praise him and follow him precisely because he is our Messiah and King and we should not place false expectations on him. Jesus is our creator, the one who gives us life. He is the one who brings us real and eternal peace and salvation.

Our elected Government, whoever they turn out to be, may disappoint us, they may not meet our expectations, they may not follow through on their promises. But Jesus is always faithful, and he keeps all his promises. Will we put our complete trust in him, will we follow him? If we do, I know we will not be disappointed. Don't be swayed by the crowd who speak falsely against him. Hold on to him, our Saviour and King.

Let's pray:

Father God, we give thanks that you are faithful and true. You promised salvation through the Messiah and today, we remember that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of our promised Redeemer. We acknowledge our need for salvation and rejoice that Jesus is our Deliverer. We celebrate Him today as King and ask that His Kingdom come into our lives, too.

Father, thank You that Jesus came humbly, riding on a donkey, proclaiming peace. We pray for peace in all places, especially in Jerusalem and Palestine at this time. Make us instruments of your peace and guide us in the ministry of reconciliation. We pray for all to turn to you that they may receive peace in their hearts and life everlasting. In the name of Jesus, Messiah and King. Amen.