

First Presbyterian Church of Hanford

“THE UN-DAVID”

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Text: Matthew 21: 1-11 *ESV*

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

Israel Needed a Messiah

In the first century, Israel was a nation hungering, thirsting, and longing for a promised messiah. They longed for king like David who would establish them in the land promised to them by God. They remembered His word through the prophets. Israel would be restored, and the covenant with David—for an everlasting kingdom—was yet to be established. They had waited for 400 years since the last of the prophets, and their conquest by the Roman Empire had them wondering just how long God would make them wait.

The temple had been rebuilt, and observances were made by the book, but the *Shekinah* glory of God did not occupy it as in the stories of old. It's worth noting that Israel had even beat their centuries-long addiction to idols. They were doing pretty well, but anxious for the final fulfillment of God's promised messiah, another David, a Son of David, who whose power might even eclipse that of Rome. They waited and waited, and waiting became their spirituality. I imagine it felt to them like God had left the building.

The promises of God kept them faithful, but the gap between promise and reality was enormous. There was no king, and no sign of the next David—not yet.

Good folks of First Pres, you know how they felt! You have endured years of good pastors—all of whom you expected to stay—who were not able to. God is good, and He keeps His promises, and your spirituality has been a kind of waiting, wanting, and faithfully enduring. I want you all to know that I see it, hear it, and sense it. You've been through a lot! I owe my highest respects to all those servants of God who have preceded me—Tony, the Tims, and all the interims—they all loved and served the Lord and gave themselves as they could, and we thank God for each of them and what they were able to bring in the time they were here. I respect each of them and labor to bring honor to the office they carried through these storms.

We all know what it is to wait in hope. We *get* Israel, don't we?

Israel *Expected* a Messiah

Israel *needed* a messiah, but they were already expecting one before that need was felt.

Isaiah 9:6

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder.”

This sounds like one born to be king.

Psalm 2:7-8

The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”

This is the language of imperial triumph.

Zechariah 9:9-10

Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

Even in humility, the Messiah is an imperial king.

The Jewish Scribes, Pharisees, and rabbis did not have to pick nits out of Scripture to build up the idea of a Messiah; it was loudly proclaimed again and again. The promised Messiah was plainly foretold. But as happens with us, our imaginings tend to be very limited and fall far short of the greatness of God. Their picture of a Messiah, despite Scripture, was colored by wishful thinking and projections. They imagined David returning—a great, rich, warrior-king in gleaming armor, mounted on a white charger, attended by the A-Team of his court—broad-shouldered soldiers full of confidence and joy over their victories. This army would march in from the Mount of Olives, and the people would be filled with joy and collective self-esteem.

Their expectations were shaped not only by prophecy, but by their own imaginings of David and messianic power.

A "Triumphal" Entry

Jesus rides in on a donkey, dressed like a peasant rabbi, surrounded by 12 less-than-confident non-warrior types, all on foot. The crowds cheer like crazy, “Hosanna, Hosanna!” The word is Aramaic and meant something like “Oh Save!” but like many idioms, in time, tends to lose its literal meaning. It’s like shouting “Olé!” at a bullfight or during a flamenco dance. It comes from the word *Allah*, Arabic for *God*, but that meaning has long disappeared. When we say *G’bye*, it’s literally “God be with you,” but that isn’t what most people mean by it.

People wanted a Messiah, needed a Messiah, and though there had been a dozen Messiah-wanna-bes before Jesus, the crowd lost none of its fervor. Perhaps *this year’s* messiah might actually make it. Like today, I’m sure some people really believed he was the messiah, and many others doubted it, but loved the party.

It would have been easy to doubt that Jesus was the one. No horse, no army, no armor, and none of the things that made old king David impressive and memorable.

Why would some people celebrate Jesus as the Messiah when they didn’t really believe he had a chance? Well, they despised much of the Temple Establishment—the taxes, the elitist attitudes of superiority, and the compromises with Rome to keep the peace. For some, it wasn’t so much a demonstration of belief in this Jesus of Nazareth as it was an opportunity to protest the corruption of Jerusalem and the temple.

So here they were, crying out *Hosanna!* and *Blessed is He who comes in the name of The Lord!*—welcoming the successor to David’s promised throne—all to one who looks like a poor shepherd who has never fought a day in his life. The picture is dripping with irony.

If you're familiar with *Les Misérables*, you'll remember the parade they held called *Fête des Fous*, *the Feast of Fools*, or *Festival of Fools*. It was a low-brow parody of the royal classes, including the Church powers. They would elect a mock bishop and hold a coronation for a mock king—whoever was popular among them that year. It was a party and all the common folk were invited. It was like *Mardi Gras* or Spring Break—party time, for sure.

In this *Festival of Fools*, dignity was lampooned. It was a game just for fun, and everyone understood—a pressure valve for communities under pressure. This was a major element of Palm Sunday.

The King rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. The rabble lay down their coats, bow and cry, "Hail to the king!" if only for fun. The great joke in all this is that this was the real thing—the veritable event foretold by the prophets—the true Son of David/Son of God entering into Jerusalem in perfect fulfillment of prophecy.

Imagine if the real king of France had disguised himself as a pauper, walked among the rabble in the *Fête des Fous*, and by dumb luck been selected to play the mock king of their parade. Marched up, celebrated with mock solemnity, enthroned and crowned with a broken flower pot as the lowly crowds sang "Long live the king!" That is Palm Sunday.

And it doesn't end here. Jesus will enter Jerusalem, and by the end of the week, the Romans will get in on the game. They will throw a red towel over his shoulders, make a crown out of thorns, bow down calling Him King, and then enthrone Him upon a cross.

The mock king is the real king. The mock praise deserves their whole hearts, which they are not capable of giving.

How is this a mirror of contemporary worship here in America? Do we even know the greatness and real power of the one we praise? Do we believe ourselves when we sing, [half-heartedly] "Oh Lord, You are Almighty God!"

Is the Church today part of the *Fools Parade*? We should wonder.

Shattered Expectations

The irony is deafening. The crowd shouted, "*Hoorah! Olé! Hosanna!*" to one who wore no armor. No warhorse, no army at his back—just twelve confused disciples and a donkey that had never been ridden. They literally shout, "*Oh, save us!*" to the true Savior. The joke was the truth, and no one saw it, no one got it.

In short, Israel's expectations are being shattered. Scribes and Pharisees who should have recognized the Messiah failed to. The public's expectation of a great conquering military hero goes unmet. But there is a pattern here that we see from the beginning of Scripture:

GOD SHATTERS OUR EXPECTATIONS WHILE FULFILLING OUR HOPES

This is the pattern of how God works.

The pattern was that the firstborn son inherited everything. None of the Patriarchs was a firstborn. King David was the youngest son, and not at all what the people expected—Saul, a tall, strong, handsome king. God delivers Israel from slavery in Egypt through a fugitive murderer with a speech impediment and a stick. And Jesus, the Messiah, was certainly not what they expected.

The pattern is not accidental. It is theological. God seems to always operate beneath the threshold of human expectation. It is crystal clear that these narratives are not manmade because no one would make them that way.

So Jesus, the Son of David, is as UN-David as we could imagine. Yet he is David *fulfilled*.

David took Jerusalem by military conquest; Jesus takes it by weeping over it. David built a house for God; Jesus *is* the house of God. David longed for God's presence in the Temple, and Jesus is God walking in.

Our Expectations & Hopes

First Pres has been through a lot of shattered expectations. A capable and beloved pastor has a heart attack and must leave to preserve his life and health. A new hope was brutally taken from you by an automobile accident that feels pointless and unjust. The departure of families, the wound of division, the disorienting turnover of pastoral leadership. These are not trivial losses.

Some in that Palm Sunday crowd—who eagerly ran out to see this Jesus who some claimed was their legitimate Messiah—were genuinely disappointed by what they saw. *That? That is our true Messiah?* Their expectations were reasonable given what they knew and had been trained to expect.

The temptation is to lower expectations permanently as a form of self-protection. *If I don't hope too much, I won't be hurt again.* That temptation is not wisdom, but a kind of despair that wears the costume of *realism*.

We can be like the Palm Sunday crowd, some of whom will change their shouts from *Hosanna* to *Crucify* in a few short days. This is the cost of depending too heavily on our expectations.

But *Hope* is confidence in the character and faithfulness of God. It is, as Paul writes in Romans 5, a hope that does not put us to shame, because it is grounded not in our projections but in the love of God poured out through the Holy Spirit.

The Palm Sunday crowd played out Israel's expectations by shouting *Hosanna*, half-believing it. They got more than they asked for — *infinitely* more — in a form they couldn't recognize until after the resurrection.

Sometimes, you may feel like you are going through the motions of hope. You may be celebrating God's faithfulness, singing of His greatness, with one eye watching for a sign that this, too, will be a disappointment. That's all right. The disciples felt the same thing. God may shatter our expectations, but our hopes will not be left unfulfilled.

Palm Sunday stands between expectation and fulfilled hopes — and so does First Presbyterian Church, Hanford, on this day.

We march with Jesus into Jerusalem. If we are wise, we relax our preconceived expectations and set our hearts forward afresh for what God will do next to complete His will among us. †