

Sermon Manuscript

**“Expectations.”**

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Westwood First Presbyterian Church

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**Sermon Manuscript:**

In 4th grade I was in love with Angel. Yes, that was her name. I got up the nerve one day to write her a note proclaiming my love for her. I saw her read it and smile a bit - I think. Later, my friend Fred came up to me and told me he had heard about my love note, that Angel had shared it with him and others, and they all thought it was funny. I was, of course, devastated...and deeply disappointed. What I thought would be one thing, turned out not to be. Well, as we jump into Holy Week...we know that expectations can lead to disappointment...

Here we are on Palm Sunday 2024! And, it's a big day...the day we kick off Holy Week 2024! This is the week that we begin the home stretch if you will...we have spent the past 30+ days in Lent preparing for this last part of the journey towards the cross. But, we aren't there yet...we have some more journeying to do...we have some more reality to face...we have some disappointment to do deal with as the story unfolds.

Today though, we wave palms and proclaim that Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem! He comes to the city gates having sent two unnamed disciples to get a colt, one that has never been ridden. Other gospel narratives of this story say that Jesus rode a donkey, not a colt. A donkey signified humility, but Mark is making a statement by using a colt, an untamed one at that! This Jesus is making a statement that history is moving towards. It is wild, it is untamed, and it is the center of the universal arc of history that is leading towards victory...that love does ultimately win.

Mark doesn't name the disciples. Yet it seems like they were dealing with so many questions, so much doubt, and quite a bit of anxiety. They were uncertain of what was going to happen next, but they had hopes. The crowds on the other hand were filled with folks on the margins, the hoi polloi, common people. They were not the power brokers, but common folk who had heard about Jesus, had seen Jesus, and were drawn to this movement that was radically inclusive and had a promise of something new to emerge.

Other Gospel narratives say that the power people, the religious leaders, wanted Jesus to silence the crowds, that they were getting out of hand. They were missing the point...Jesus said that he could not and would not stop them, because if he did, then even the rocks would cry out.

All of creation, Jesus is saying in effect, was in eager anticipation of this moment, of this season, that would change everything.

Jesus was on his way to the festival, Passover, a celebration, at the Temple, the spiritual center of Judaism...once there, he would proclaim that it would be destroyed and rebuilt in 3 days. In essence, this temple doesn't contain God, God is contain-less, God is in all things. And that his body, the body of Christ, in which we all live in, is universal. And, that in a world filled with wars, disinformation, false narratives that divide us, plagues, pandemics, hunger, crisis after crisis, that there will be peace on earth. Hosanna literally translates to "save us". The people are wanting salvation, a restoration, if you will, to being able to live as humanity and creation was intended to live. Restoration from all of the destructive narratives that divide...restoration to our truest selves as created in God's image.

Yet, we know the story. These religious leaders, political pawns in a system that they've created to benefit themselves, turn enough of the crowd by the end of the week to turn the proclamations of "hosanna" to "crucify him". They become disappointed, deeply.

Friends, all of us face holy week, and our lives, with expectations...and often we are disappointed, but disappointment is also key for our growth. David Whyte, the poet, says this:

*Disappointment is a friend to transformation, a call to both accuracy and generosity in the assessment of our self and others, a test of sincerity and a catalyst of resilience. Disappointment is just the initial meeting with the frontier of an evolving life, an invitation to reality, which we expected to be one particular way and turns out to be another, often something more difficult, more overwhelming and strangely, in the end, more rewarding.*

Jesus doesn't change course that week. He must continue towards the reality of the ups and downs of the life that he shares with humanity.

He had been journeying upwards, towards Jerusalem. Jerusalem is on a hill, pilgrimages to Jerusalem have an upward movement. It can be hard. Add into that the opposition of some, those with loud voices and a transactional worldview that is skewed towards the few, Jesus knew that the final part of his journey would be the hardest.

After Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, the ascent, the upward movement is over...and the week starts out with a celebration and then moved downward, a descent, into death. Of Jesus giving himself away...of letting love flow out of him into us...Jesus, descending, God with us in the throes of life, of celebration, and of disappointment.

This messenger walked in the way of humility, of giving himself away...we just read in our lectionary passage in Philippians this phrase of Jesus emptying himself, pouring himself out...

*<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,*

*<sup>8</sup>he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.*

And it holds for us the reality that we have to celebrate a message and the messenger that is bringing Good News of God's being with all of us. And, we also have to bear the reality that this message and messenger will keep on calling us towards something beautiful and hard: growth and restoration...healing our image of ourselves that we have created towards the image that God has made us in, that we are loved and we are God's own...and that we are in constant union with God, one another, all of creation, the Universe. We are the body of Christ, the universal body of Christ, and no one is to be left out of that love...this connection calls us to go through darkness, to lean into them, and to remember, to hold on to this narrative that God gives us, and that we proclaim even in the disappointment, even in the darkness. And that embracing this journey, the ups and downs, the celebrations, the expectations, and the hard disappointment, that we come to terms with who we are and we are transformed...resurrected even.

We still have to deal with this journey of emptying of ourselves...and, in the process of losing our life, we gain life and we move forward towards a deeper growth. And, we look forward to the resurrection we can declare: "Love Wins!"