

AstepFURTHER

DIVING DEEPER INTO SUNDAY'S SERMON

A resource of First Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale for individuals, families, and small groups that offers deeper insights into the previous Sunday's scripture text and sermon.

From the Sermon on 3/29/26 "When Expectations Meet Reality"

Opening Prayer: *"Gracious God, as we enter this Holy Week, open our hearts to see Jesus as he truly is, not as we expect him to be, but as you have revealed him. Help us stay present even when our expectations are overturned. Give us courage to follow a suffering Savior rather than a conquering king. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." ' ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' ¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Understanding the Context: (Explore aspects of the passage like place, adjacent scripture, and other elements)

1. What expectations did the crowd have as Jesus entered Jerusalem? Consider the references to Zechariah 9 and 2 Kings 11. What kind of "savior" were they looking for?
2. How does Mark's ending of this passage (verse 11) subvert those expectations? What's significant about Jesus simply looking around and leaving?

Key Themes: (When Expectation Meets Reality)

3. The sermon asks: "What are the stories that you tell yourself?" How do cultural narratives (social media, success stories, etc.) shape what we expect from God?
4. James K.A. Smith observes a gap between "what I want and what I think I want." Where do you see this gap in your own spiritual life? Are there ways you say you want to follow Jesus while your habits point elsewhere?

Application and Action:

5. The sermon challenges us to "stay" even when God doesn't meet our expectations. When have you been tempted to walk away because God didn't show up the way you hoped?
6. What would it look like practically to want a "suffering Savior" rather than just a conquering king? How might this change your daily priorities, relationships, or responses to difficulty?
7. This Holy Week, commit to "staying" with Jesus through the whole story, not just Palm Sunday, but through Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. What specific practice will help you do this? Options: Attend a Maundy Thursday or Good Friday service, read the Passion narrative daily, observe a fast, practice silence.
2. Identify one "Costco hot dog moment" in your life—a place where your actions don't align with what you say you believe. What's one concrete step you can take this week to close that gap?

Group Discussion:

If you are studying with others, discuss your reflections and insights.

1. Share about a time when God didn't meet your expectations. How did you respond? Looking back, what was God doing in that season?
2. The crowd shouted "Hosanna!" (save us) on Sunday and "Crucify him!" by Friday. What causes our allegiance to Jesus to waver? How do we cultivate the kind of faith that "stays" through disappointment?

Closing Prayer:

“Lord Jesus, you entered Jerusalem knowing exactly what awaited you. You chose the path of suffering love over earthly power. Forgive us for the times we've wanted a different kind of Savior, one who fits our expectations rather than transforms them. This week, help us stay. Help us watch. Help us trust that your way, though it leads through the cross, is the way of true hope. May our lives reflect not just what we think we want, but what our hearts truly need: You. Amen.”

This Week's Challenge:

This Week's Challenge: Read one chapter of Mark's Passion narrative each day (Mark 11-16), asking God to show you where your expectations need to be transformed by his reality.