

Luke 19:28-40 N.T. 78 (NRSV)

²⁸After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴They said, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying,

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” ⁴⁰He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

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Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. O God, our God, create in us clean hearts and put a new a right spirit within each of us. Open our minds and soften our hearts so we can hear and understand your Holy Word today. In Jesus precious Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: When royalty comes to town, this is what we expect to hear:

{Play “*VIP Fanfare.mp3*” [0:21]}

The trumpet fanfare creates excitement. It builds our expectations for what’s about to come. We anticipate seeing **an emperor** carried on his throne. We stand on our tippy toes straining to catch a glimpse of **the king** arriving in a gilded horse drawn carriage. We press against the rope line as the **motorcade approaches** complete with flags flapping on the fenders of the presidential limousine.

{Play “*Four Ruffles and Flourishes.mp3*” [0:09]}

Yes, a royal entrance calls for lots of pomp and circumstance. This makes us ordinary folks feel small and humble. The sense of royalty’s greatness overwhelms us. The royal spectacle fills us with awe, young and old alike. What we expect to see next is **Napoleon riding** in on his great white stallion. But two millennia ago, on that first Palm Sunday what the crowd saw was an **ordinary looking fellow** riding on a donkey. Palm Sunday was a pompless circumstance. There were no trappings of power, no armed guards, no flourish of trumpets. On Palm Sunday, Jesus didn’t come **blazing into town on a white stallion**; there was no smoke coming from his horses’ nostrils, and no gleaming sword in his hand. Rather, on Palm Sunday Jesus came **ambling into town** on a lowly donkey. We’re yearning for a mighty warrior king, but what God has sent us is a humble servant.

PAUSE

Move I.

Our expectations aren't God's expectations. Let me say that again, "our expectations aren't God's expectations." Now I know that to many of you that statement might sound pretty obvious. Of course, God has insights and perspectives that we don't. That's part of what makes God, God. But while the Bible clearly tells us that **God made us** after God's own image, one of our weaknesses as lowly human beings is that we're always attempting to turn the tables and remake God after our own image. We think we know what the future should hold. We think **we know what's best**, not only for ourselves but for everyone else in the world, and for all of the generations yet to come.

Here in the United States of America we live as a people who have lofty expectations. How does the preamble of our constitution go?

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Those words are revered words. Those words declare that here in America, the will of the people reigns supreme. The people know what's best for themselves. It's the people who ordain and establish the government, not the other way around.

Our Bible lesson today is about a people who felt they knew what was best for themselves too. They had had enough of the **Roman occupation**. They were tired of **paying oppressive taxes** to a distant government who did nothing for them. They were a chosen people. They were Jews. They were Israelites. They were a distinct people with a distinct religion living in a distinct land. They had had enough of these **pagan foreigners lording over them**. They were a people ripe for insurrection. But they needed a leader. They needed a person to rise from their own ranks with the charisma and courage to stand up to the Romans.

That was the background to the spectacle there in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday some two millennia ago. **When the people of Jerusalem saw Jesus** riding into town on the back of that donkey, they saw the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Zechariah. **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey”** (Zechariah 9:9a, NRSV). Yes, the people of Jerusalem had a lot of high expectations. The people of Jerusalem were expecting a savior who would come and deliver them from the oppression of their Roman overlords. But that wasn't what **God was expecting**. God expectations were much grander than the people of Jerusalem's expectations. The people of Jerusalem were expecting a **political revolution**. But God was expecting a spiritual revolution. The people of Jerusalem were expecting victory over the Romans. But God was expecting **victory over sin**. The people of Jerusalem were expecting a mighty warrior king, but what God offered to them and continues to offer to us today is a suffering servant who willingly faces down death for us.

On this Palm Sunday what are our expectations. What are we longing for in our hearts? What are we looking to be delivered from? Who would we have to be king over us? Are we really any different from those people on that first Palm Sunday in Jerusalem? Aren't we still wishing to form **a more perfect union**? Aren't we wishing for a charismatic leader? Aren't we wishing for a less oppressive government? Aren't we wishing for prosperity for our children and ourselves? Aren't we, like the people of Jerusalem, expecting political solutions when we should be **expecting spiritual solutions**? Do we really think we know what's best for ourselves, or are we open to the reality that God really does know better? **Yes, our expectations really aren't God's expectations.**

End I.

Move II.

And our ways aren't God's ways. Each of us does what we feel is **right in our own eyes**, but just because we think its right, that doesn't make it right. No matter what the drumbeat of society might say, we are not the ones who define the standards of **right and wrong**. God does that. God sets the standards, and we live under those standards whether we believe God or not. The sobering reality is that try as we might, we can't ever seem to fully grasp God's standards. So why are we so quick to judge others, so often without knowing all of the facts or the person's true motives? **As Jesus himself** said about the woman caught in adultery, **“Let anyone who is without sin among you, be the first to throw a stone at her”** (John 8:7b, NRSV). Try as we might, none of us can ever fully know God's ways, let alone fully live by God's ways. God tells us this through the Old Testament prophet **Isaiah** where the prophet writes, **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD”** (Isaiah 55:8, NRSV). That's why we need a savior. Not because we cannot do any good, but because despite all of the good we do do, there is always something we've done that we shouldn't have or something else we should have done that we haven't. We're caught up in the old **woulda, coulda, shoulda**, but **didn't**. If we're honest with ourselves, in our heart we know that none of us truly lead lives without any regrets. At times, we all try to live life our own way.

I remember back in 2010 during the last year I was pastor of the Riverview United Methodist Church in Beaver Falls. A much beloved local politician fell from grace. **His name was Mike Veon**, and while I didn't know him personally, many people in the church had grown up with him. He was the state legislator from the 14th congressional district for 11 terms. But then Mike Veon got caught up in what was known as the **“bonesgate”** scandal and he was **ultimately convicted** of 14 of 59 counts brought against him.

From all accounts, Mike Veon started out as a dedicated public servant, but somewhere along the way, he lost his bearings and slipped over the line becoming yet another corrupt politician. **When he was convicted**, the local paper ran an article interviewing many of Veon's disappointed supporters. One of those supporters felt there was a lesson to be learned from Mr. Veon's downfall. He said and I quote, **"It's not your office. ... You're a servant of the public. The public isn't your servant."** Yes, we all can learn a lesson from that. We can readily adapt those words like this to apply to ourselves: **"It's not your life. You're a servant of the giver of life. The giver of life isn't your servant."** You're in danger of slipping over the line when you put your own needs ahead of others. You're in danger of slipping over the line when you put your political party's needs ahead of the people's needs. And you're also in danger of slipping over the line when you put your country's needs ahead of your Creator's needs. It's easy for any of us to do what's right in our own eyes, but it's a whole other story to do what's right in God's eyes. That takes divine intervention.

I've titled today's message, *"Collision Course."* When we live life our own way, we've set ourselves on a collision course with God's way. Like Mike Veon as we slip over that line, we keep telling ourselves that what we're doing is best for the people, best for the party, best for the state, and of course best for ourselves. Justifying our own actions in our mind really isn't hard. But there's an ancient tidbit of wisdom that applies to us all. **"There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death"** (Proverbs 14:12, NRSV.) If we keep going our own way, eventually we're gonna collide with that immovable object of God's way. **And then we'll see that our ways really are not God's ways.**

End II.

Move III.

So, let's humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. When we see Jesus coming, riding on a lowly donkey, we need to cry out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" (Luke 19:38, NRSV). There's no need for pomp and circumstance. There's no need for a trumpet fanfare. What's needed is our humility and obedience. Many Jews in Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside had witnessed the many miracles Jesus performed. They'd seen Jesus **heal the sick**, make the **lame walk**, the **blind see**, and **raise the dead**. Jesus was a miracle worker extraordinaire. **They saw Jesus** as being the long-awaited Messiah, that's why they cried out in unison the words of **Psalm 118:26a "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD."** One verse later, in **Palms 118:27b** we see the command instructing the people **"With boughs in hand, join the festal procession."** That's why the people waved palm branches as Jesus rode into town on a donkey two-millennia ago.

I've always had mixed feelings about our annual Palm Sunday celebration. Every year, like those early disciples of Jesus, we wave palm branches while singing **"Hosanna loud hosanna, the little children sing."** We claim Jesus as our Messiah, our savior, our king. But the reason for my mixed feelings is that the jubilation of Palm Sunday is so short lived. **The same crowd** who's shouting "hosanna" on Sunday, is shouting **"crucify him, crucify him,"** by Friday. Do we really think we're more faithful than them? **Remember Peter**, a disciple who had been **with Jesus from the start**, a disciple who was an **eyewitness to Jesus' transfiguration**, even Peter had **denied ever knowing** Jesus three times by Friday morning. It's easy being a disciple of Jesus Christ when our expectations are being met. It's easy being a disciple of Jesus Christ when things are going our way.

Remember God didn't send Jesus as a warrior king, but as a suffering servant. The **jubilation of Palm Sunday** leads to the **desperation of Good Friday**.

What happens to faith when hopes are dashed, and dreams turn into nightmares? **The people of Jerusalem expected** Jesus to liberate them from the Romans, **but Jesus didn't do that**. Jesus didn't meet the expectations of the people in Jerusalem; he met the expectations of his Father in heaven. **And God expected Jesus to die on the cross of Calvary**. Jesus' death has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. Jesus took our place in death so that we might share his place in life. Our faith in Jesus might waiver, but Jesus' faith for us remains steadfast. The palms of today's celebration become **the ashes** for next year's Ash Wednesday call to repentance. And it is out of those ashes that **God lovingly restores us to life** in Christ Jesus day after day and year after year.

Jesus is our redeemer. Jesus washes away our faults, our blemishes, our sins, and he makes us white as snow. Jesus wasn't just the redeemer of those people of Jerusalem two-millennia ago. Jesus is **your redeemer**, and he's **my redeemer**, and he's **Mike Veon's redeemer too**.

I'm going to close this morning with a chorus that's based on the words of James 4:10. It's "***Humble Yourself in the Sight of the Lord.***"

**Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord,
Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord,
And God will lift you up, (*higher, and higher,*)
And God will lift you up.**

The only way to avoid the **imminent collision** is to let go of your way and grab on to God's way. And then God will lift you up, higher and higher. **So, let's humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord today.**

End III.

Conclusion: When royalty comes to town, we expect to hear a trumpet fanfare. We expect to see flags flapping on the fender of the presidential limousine. But Jesus didn't come prancing in on white stallion. Jesus came ambling in on a lowly donkey. **Yes, our expectations really aren't God's expectations.** When we're expecting a mighty warrior king, God sends a lowly suffering servant. When we're expecting political solutions, God's expecting spiritual solutions. **And our ways really aren't God's ways either.** Each of us does what we feel is right in our own eyes, but just because we think it's right, that doesn't make it right. God's the one who sets the standards of right and wrong, not us. **So, let's humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord today.** Remember the palms we wave today will become the ashes we use when we begin Lent all over again next year on Ash Wednesday. Grab on to Jesus and avoid the "*imminent collision.*" Jesus took our place in death so that we might share his place in life. **Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.** Hosanna to our King!

{Play "*Sounds of the SHOFAR.mp3*" [0:10]}

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. Almighty God, eternal Father, everlasting king, create in us clean hearts, and put a new and right spirit within each of us today. **Amen!**

Closing Hymn: "*Living for Jesus*" On Screen

All Four Verses

Sending Forth: Is your life on a collision course? Then stop doing things your way and start doing things God's way. Go forth, and humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and God will lift you up, higher, and higher. **Amen!**