

A number of years ago before there was AirBnB, my family decided we were going to get away for a weekend in the mountains.

I don't know if you get like this sometimes and Brooklyn is home but sometimes you just need to run for the hills. Well we found a place and set off. It was just after a recent hurricane, major storm that had come through the Northeast and so it was a beautiful and somewhat treacherous journey.

When we got there, we had to meet the owner at motel that was from the looks of it completely empty. She told us that some of the roads had been closed for some time and so there hadn't been visitors for some time and she was super thankful we had rented her place. Oh, and she also told us that the place wouldn't have hot water for at least the night.

We left from there, drove up to the place and opened the door. It was significantly smaller than what we had been told and then we went upstairs to find that the bunk beds we were promised that my girls were eagerly anticipating were not there and our bedroom instead of being a queen size bed from the add [which was an upgrade from home was in fact two more single beds. This on top of a TV that didn't work and a broken couch oh and a pool in the complex that was closed for repairs.

This weekend getaway meant to refresh us was turning into a disaster but it was late, we were far from home and I had two hungry tired girls.

*Have you been there? A situation or circumstance you were hoping would go one way that turns out completely different?*

*Something you hope for that doesn't materialize. Maybe it's not the getaway, but the promotion you were expecting or the raise, maybe it's marriage you had assumed would be so easy and fulfilling, maybe its sickness or debt you want to be free from or maybe it's just the hope for a train to come on time or a parking spot to be available after work.*

This morning, as we celebrate palm Sunday God wants to meet us in the midst of all this, as He has met me in preparation, that as we look at what is for some of us a familiar section of the Bible, we would come I trust and be refreshed by His

## **UNEXPECTED OFFER**

And as we look together at this section, we are first confronted with the question of

### **What we expect**

To give some background in where we find ourselves. First, the Jewish people are living under Roman rule, most are working poor, heavily taxed and marginalized in the larger community. On top of this, there were religious leaders of the day placing heavily ritualized religion upon them, many rules and expectations. The religiously elite were the teachers who were literate and [think known, influential, seen].

And so in the midst of this Jesus comes. Many wonder if He is the promised successor of David, who will once again establish a rule and a kingdom, restoring the power of God's people. In fact Jesus closest followers thought this very thing

And instead, Jesus comes in on a borrowed donkey and dies. Instead of a throne, He takes a cross.

They had seen Jesus do amazing things and now they were ready for Him to set up shop and make things right.

They expected immediate deliverance and change. They were expecting a new leader, a new king to come and fix things. They were expecting Jesus to inaugurate a NOW kingdom.

In fact earlier in Matthew's account, in 20:21, two of the disciples' moms ask Jesus

*““What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.””*

– Matthew 20:21

*We are, I am so tempted to fall into this trap. We think that Jesus just changing our circumstances is going to fix everything. I just need a new job and then everything will be all better, all we need is a new leader, a different president and everything will be better. We live in a culture of immediacy also that needs everything now or even yesterday and we find ourselves living on the edge of frustration with things don't happen right away.*

Without work and without think we just falling into expecting ease and immediacy.

And then there's the Pharisees, and we are often so quick to dismiss them removing ourselves from them but oh how much we are like them.

In this moment and really this was the problem the religious leaders faced again and again is that what they expected because Jesus was a rabbi just like them, that He would back them, praise them and instead He consistently humbles them.

We expect, I expect that Jesus is going to exalt me, that He's going to make much of me. This is the air we breathe day to day, that of self-exaltation, self-congratulation, self-promotion and we just want Jesus to co-sign our greatness, our accomplishments, our wisdom. This is what some have called the "me" religion, making all things, even my own growth and life plan only about me.

Jesus there making a big fuss about you and you need to tell them to be quiet because it's making us look bad and feel bad.

The Pharisees were expecting praise and affirmation and instead He was telling them "You missed it guys, all your Bible knowledge, all your power and profile and you didn't recognize God." As Darrell Bock says in a way we must get now, Jesus in verse 40, come on guys, are you dumber than rocks? We want and expect our egos to be stroked and instead Jesus humbles us.

### **What does this mean for me?**

What do we expect? What are we expecting? Is life going as we planned? Are we expecting Jesus to simply alleviate our troubles, our problems, our pain. This isn't to minimize the real troubles you and I have, are and will face. Instead as He teaches the crowd and us, we can let our expectations of what we think Jesus ought to do

or what we want Him to do, blind us to what He is doing. We can't assume we'll always know how God works, sometimes we need to simply trust that He is working, in ways we can't see or even understand.

Life is sometimes a wrestling with the present and future we imagined or want vs. the One He has planned.

And so like the people laying down their coats and palm branches, Jesus sometimes will simply ask us to lay things down. To lay down how we think should go, to lay down our timeline, our need to be right.

***I expect Jesus to get us out of the mess and instead what often does is He meets us in it.***

And so when we are willing, ready to lay down our expectations, we are ready to see, to know, to embrace and to love what He offers

What does Jesus offer?

Well first two practical encouragements and realities and then a profound truth.

The first is that

### **He offers invitation**

It's important to note that there is no filler in the Bible. This isn't to say every word has the same weight and that there is hidden profound insight in every single detail, but everything matters and it's often little moments, we tend to overlook. And this makes a profound statement to us about the beauty and profound nature of the offer.

Look again at the start of the section again, Jesus asks two of the disciples to go and get a colt.

You have to wonder in that moment, what they were thinking. Jesus, we have so many things to do, we've seen so many miracles and you want us to go and get a donkey for you. But the beauty of this is that, He is asking for their help. The King of the universe is asking for help. And what Jesus wants them and us to know is that in His kingdom, as African pastor and theologian, Paul John Isaak states

*"We are always regarded as useful in the sight of God"*

God's kingdom is reserved for those who are prolific, powerful, pretty, no it's an invitation for all of to simply obedience and faithfulness to do little things well. Ministry is reserved for the smart people or the strong or the young, its an invitation to all to join in.

***Instead of simply doing for, He invites us to do with***

Beyond this, think for a moment about what that simple act of getting a donkey is doing. If your Bible has footnotes, you'll notice there are references to this scene that go back to Zechariah 9:9 and the prophecy of a king riding on a colt. And so these disciples in their simple obedience were fulfilling a promise made by God centuries before. What we need to know is that our simple obedience can pave the way for others to meet Jesus. Jesus was asking the disciples to do something simple to bring about

something important. He doesn't expect all of us to be prominent, in fact a lot of what we do will go unnoticed by man. But God takes notice of our faithfulness and will reward it in due time, (remember expectations). We'll receive our due in time. But every simple act done in worship, obedience and trust will bring about realities, answers, promises we can't see or fathom.

He's offering all of us a seat at the table in the kingdom and we all play a part in the unfolding plan of redemption in our homes, schools and neighborhoods.

### **What does this mean for me?**

Do you know this? Do you think you need to be smart and all together and strong, before you can join in God's plan? Do you think there is a set of criteria? The criteria is simple trust in Jesus. Are there things you feel you aren't qualified for, ready for, good enough for?

He not only offers invitation

### **He offers intimacy**

The people were calling out for a king but God kept warning them about trusting in a political system to fix things all the way back to when they first asked for a king like the surrounding nations. This isn't to dismiss or even demonize political systems but power can corrupt and the leaders they wanted inevitably became those who would ask excessively of them, even abuse them separate themselves from society and stand over them with harsh demands and expectations.

And in stark contrast, comes Jesus. Riding in on a borrowed animal, to little fanfare and as He comes into the city, instead of fighting for a

seat at the table and a spot on the throne, weeps over the city. This was a prophetic moment for Jesus, not only in signaling answers that were coming promised long ago but a call to admit that things weren't right.

Walter Brueggemann, in his incredible book, *The Prophetic Imagination* says,

*“Real [prophetic] criticism begins in the capacity to grieve because that is the most visceral. announcement that things are not right. Only in the empire are we pressed and urged and invited to pretend that things are all right—either in the dean’s office or in our marriage or in the hospital room. And as long as the empire can keep the pretense alive that things are all right, there will be no real grieving and no serious criticism.”*

Jesus was grieving because things were not right and He couldn't pretend and it is in this capacity and willingness to grieve and weep that draws us into Jesus because He is not removed, separated, unaware, indignant to our plight, our struggles, our limitations.

Jesus came to dwell among us, walk amongst us, hear, see, taste, smell, the human experience. He humbled Himself and came to us,

to be with us, to purposefully give up intimate fellowship with His Father, take on human limitations.

He offers sympathy, not separation, not Indignant superiority. He offers tears when we are broken and hurting.

### **What does this mean for me?**

He invites us to do the same. He entrusts us to invite others in, to share, to support, to participate. To look around at those who are not invited, who don't feel welcome, who maybe feel neglected and maybe even useless and help them find their important place in His kingdom, in this community. He invites us to extend His sympathy

This starts with seeing our city, our community like Jesus does. Do we weep over the city? Do we weep over the brokenness of our city or do we stand in judgment and separation?

The reality is that,

- Our neighbors are crying out
- Our co-workers are crying out
- Our city and our country are crying out

Things are not right, things are not as they should be.

Pastor Traci Blackmon shared a powerful message I heard last year about Moses and the burning bush. She reminded us that one of the reasons the bush was on fire was because God has heard the people's cries for help. The bush was a sign that God saw the pain.

### ***Do we see the bushes burning in our neighborhoods, in our communities?***

This is where it might start for some of us, it might even start with confessing that we have assumed, judged, dismissed people, that we have separated, instead of inviting, we have put up the walls

instead of help tear them down. The tears might start with our own lament over not seeing others, seeing our city, the way Jesus does.

***As a side, to the men, Jesus shows us that it's not weak to cry.***

I was on the train recently and I saw one teen of color, a teenage boy started crying and the rest of his friends started making fun of him and I wanted to tell him so bad that crying isn't weak it's strong. Dads have your kids see you cry or have you tried to hide the tears or dismiss them? Jesus shows us here that crying shows care not weakness and men, dads, particularly, this is the kind of emotional depth God is inviting us to believe and model. We don't need to have it all together, we don't have to be strong all the time because everything isn't right all the time.

Palm Sunday is a reminder that Jesus offers participation, to join Him in His redemptive work and intimacy, sympathy for our brokenness, our trouble and struggles, our pain and our limitations.

But more than all this,

**Jesus offers shalom**

The word peace seems so insufficient in describing the full scope of the offer Jesus makes and so shalom is my attempt to help us appreciate and celebrate the beauty of this compelling offer.

Because what He offers transcends leaders and circumstances and stuff.

The people thought peace would come through political structures and allegiance and affiliation and sadly the church has fallen into that trap in our day, thinking that peace will come to our country if only the right person was in office.

As Bible teacher and author Darrell Bock pointedly reminds us, we can fall into this trap of think politically and corporately,

*“The church has sometimes tried to see herself as an alternative government in the world, a type of national force that should actively overthrow God’s enemies.”*

We can fall into the thinking that our job is to rule and judge, but Jesus was reminding them and us that days will come when political allegiances will crumble, when riches and power will fail but that the peace Jesus offers transcends because it brings a relationship with God and a promise to be with us and to love us and to never leave us. He came not to judge the world but save the world by laying His life down for the world.

Instead of another leader coming to bring peace through war, Jesus offers peace by laying down His life, but being the full and final Passover lamb.

Instead of peace as a theory, this was peace as a promise, it is holistic, social, political, spiritual, emotional.

He offers peace, because He offers Himself and through Him we have access to and relationship with not just a king, but the Creator of the Universe, we are children not just of the one who rules the nation, but the One who made the rocks. We are known, accepted, forgiven, welcomed, loved not because of what we do or don’t do, because of what we do or don’t have, because of how strong or

talented or successful we are, we are loved because He made us and we trust in Jesus, what He did, what He gave.

*He offers peace that goes beyond riches or poverty, success or failure because our hope is not in those things. He offers us peace with each other because our relationship is not based on what we have, what we look like, but based on us being mutual image bearers, children of God through trusting in what His Son has done for us.*

Jesus came to break down walls that separate us, so we could enjoy peace, love, appreciation for our differences because our collective hope, trust, and peace are found together in Him.

### **What does this mean for me?**

How do we know if we are living into the fruit of this offer?

Well, where is there worry or doubt or fear or anxiety?

We have reduced our hope to alleviation and it's not coming

For some of us this means starting on the journey with Jesus by admitting that we've tried to fix things on our own, we've tried to live a good life, a good marriage, be a good neighbor, friend, worker and we keep failing. Some of us maybe before this morning didn't think we needed God's help to find peace but if we are honest, anxiety and worry, fear always seem to be under the surface and we can't shake them.

Jesus offer comes by following Him in laying down our life, admitting we can't fix ourselves, admitting we've messed up our lives and then putting our trust in Him, coming to find our joy and

happiness not in what we do or don't do, what we have or don't have, but in what He's done, living a life of perfect obedience, living the fully human life and yet giving up His life so we could be welcomed in God's family, move from God as a distant deity to a personal Father.

His plan is always better, He knows what He's doing and sometimes the way will be painful and costly and difficult, because it means laying things down, laying down our expectations and taking up his invitation to find life and peace in following Him.

So we couldn't stay the night at that house we had originally rented because it just wasn't going to work but we weren't going to just go home, it was too late for that. I remembered that a little further along was the Hunter Mountain resort and so I thought, let's see what happens.

We went up to the desk, I explained the situation and the man behind the desk basically gave us the price we would have paid for two days at the house for a night at the hotel. And the hotel was on a mountain, with a outdoor heated pool and hottub, a second adjoining room for the girls, and free breakfast.

What were expecting and what we got were two totally different things, and what we got was better.

Palm Sunday is a reminder that what Jesus offers us always better. Its not always going to be easy, or even what we choose at first. It might take longer and it could brings us to the end of ourselves. But the offer is shalom, total peace with myself with God and with others and that is one incredible offer.