

13<sup>th</sup> April 2025 – Palm Sunday

**Philippians 2:5-11**

**GREAT EXPECTATIONS – GREATER REALISATIONS**

Have you ever had the experience when something was not what you expected it to be? If you have, and I'm guessing that's the case most of us, how did what you experienced, or saw, or visited, or read, or watched, or listened to, compare to the expectations you had built up about it before hand? If it wasn't what you had anticipated, there's a good chance it was lower than expected (because these are the occasions we tend to remember and which come to our mind first up). For me, I can think of a number of times when we were on driving holidays and I would have consulted accommodation guides in years gone by, or looked at the internet in more recent times, but when after a long day's drive we arrived at the motel or cabin I had booked for our night's rest, in the face of the moans of disappointment from my family all I could say was; 'but it looked much better in the pictures!' Or, in our family the running joke is that things I buy online always arrive in a much smaller form than I had expected. My defence is that if I am buying bird toys for our parrot, which are just a jumble of rope and wooden blocks which parrots like to chew, the photos always show a macaw, a very large parrot, being dwarfed by the toy for sale, so I buy it. However, when it arrives, the toy I have paid for looks like a matchstick up against our parrot, who is himself significantly smaller than a macaw. With Izzy having the nickname of 'the feathered chainsaw', the toy I bought doesn't last long at all. I've given up on that now and just make my own toys for him.

But it can also go the other way, when what we expected is greatly exceeded by what we experience. When we went on a family holiday to the US some years ago, two places I wasn't looking forward to going to, but went because the rest of the family wanted to, were Disneyland and New York City. Both involved lots of people, noise, lining up. But I ended up loving them both, and

would happily go back to visit them again. I went to both thinking I wasn't going to like them at all, and then ended up really enjoying them.

Our great expectations – sometimes they can be severely disappointed, at others they are greatly exceeded.

Palm Sunday. Jesus coming into Jerusalem, on a donkey, and being hailed as the King and the Messiah who was promised to God's people. What do you think the disciples' expectations would have been before and while this was happening? On the one hand they shouldn't have been surprised by this humble entry; this was how Jesus had lived His life, and the King coming on a donkey was even what the prophet Isaiah had foretold in the Old Testament. But on the other hand, while Jesus had been talking for the last three years about having to suffer and die, surely His being welcomed into Jerusalem like this would mean that no longer needed to happen. Their expectations about how Jesus would become King, and the kind of King He would become, must certainly have been raised.

But we know what happened in the few days that followed this triumphant entry. The week which began on such a high, ended with Jesus' arrest, unfair trial, and death on the cross. What they had been hoping for on Sunday had certainly been totally torn down by Friday afternoon.

But for us, looking back on it, we know that it is the way it was meant to be, the way it had to be; that in order for God to come and save His people this humble Saviour was needed. In the first half of our reading here Paul writes about how even though Jesus was God, truly God, He gave all that up, for us. And then, in humility and obedience He made the ultimate sacrifice, giving up His life for us on the cross. This is what was needed for us to be saved, to be brought back to God; the One who was perfect to willingly give up His life for us. It might not be what was expected, but it was certainly what was needed.

And why? Because what happened as the result of this humility and obedience was even greater than we could expect. No matter what the expectations of the disciples were, they were greatly exceeded by what happened to Jesus after this. He was put back in the place above all others, so that

everyone would worship Him and call Him 'Lord'. The name which was written in scorn and mockery on the cross, is the now the name which is above all others. As far as He was taken down, even higher was He lifted up. This is our Saviour. The One who now intervenes for us. The One who has opened the way for us to come back to God. The One we know we can look to and rely on whatever we go through in our life.

Because the glory which is His is also ours, because of the way it came to Him. We can apply what happened to Jesus to ourselves when things don't go as we hoped they would in our lives. For the times we feel low, or lost, or wondering. For the times when any of our relationships aren't what we want them to be, or we find ourselves at a place in life where we didn't think we'd end up, for when we have guilt about anything that we can't rid ourselves of, or we feel lost, or hopeless, or wandering. At these times, we can remember that Jesus came down to walk the way that we walk, to go through the things that we go through, to be beside us and give us strength in whatever we face. In Jesus, our God didn't stay above us, looking down on us, giving us expectations we would find it impossible to live up to. No, He came down to be one of us, to go through what we go through, and then by His absolute humility and obedience open the way for us to one day return to the Father with Him. That's what it means for us that Jesus came to us in this way.

But there's another part of this reading which we don't always focus on, and that's how it begins. Paul uses the example of Jesus firstly humbling Himself and then being lifted up in glory not just to remind us of how God's love works for us, but also to tell us that Jesus gives an example which we can now follow. 'Think the same way Christ Jesus thought', or, 'Have the same mind' is another translation. As we think about that, as we look at Jesus on the donkey, and we think about how Jesus lived His life here on earth, what does that mean about how we treat people? Humility to others, obedience to God. Put that up as a lense for how we treat others, how we talk to them, the gossip we share about them, whether we put the desires and needs of others ahead of our own. How do we go with that? And it's important, because when we talk about how God in Jesus comes down to be with all people, one way He does that is by working in and through us. When people are hurting, or lost,

or wandering, when we go the way that Jesus went God can and does use us to help others to know God's love, God's care, God's presence with them in all they now go through. In taking on the way that Jesus shows us to go, we can also help people to know and experience God's love in their lives in a way they wouldn't have expected.

For Jesus' disciples, the pain of Good Friday was followed by the joy of Easter Sunday, when they discovered that no matter how great their expectations were about what Jesus would do for them and others, how God's plan for them was realised was far greater than they could ever have imagined. As we begin Holy Week remembering Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as King, and then the downs of what happened during that week, we know that it will all lead to the ultimate glory of His rising again on Sunday morning. As our Saviour, who walked the way that we walk, we know that His glory is now ours. We also know that we are called to be part of sharing and showing what Jesus' life and glory mean for people now also. In God's love for us through Jesus our expectations will never be disappointed, but we know that the life we have with Him, both now and for eternity, is one which He promises will be greater than we can ever imagine. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Can you think of any times when what you had expected or anticipated wasn't the same as what you experienced? Was it better or worse? What had set up your expectation: what others had said, pictures you had seen, or just how you imagined it would be?
- In some ways the disciples shouldn't have been surprised with how Holy Week played out for Jesus, it was what He had always said would happen, but perhaps what happened on Palm Sunday wrongly changed their expectations. Does God always act in the way that you expect Him to?
- Jesus' glory far exceeded His shame and suffering, and in the end the reality of all God has done for us in Jesus far exceeds the expectations of the disciples. Reflect on how Jesus lived His life, how He died, and the glory which is now His. What does this all mean for us and how we now live our lives in God?
- We are now called to 'have the same mind as Jesus', ie, an attitude of humility and obedience to God. What does this mean for you? What areas of your life do you need to examine in the light of this?

Pray: thank God that Jesus came to be our Saviour, taking the way of humility and obedience so that we can share in His glory. Ask God to help us also to have the same attitude Jesus had as we seek to worship and serve Him and share His love with others.

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