

**April 10, 2022**

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**Luke 19:28-40**

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

*When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, '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. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it."' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As 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, saying,*

*'Blessed is the king*

*who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Peace in heaven,*

*and glory in the highest heaven!'*

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

Thanks for that image of the sleeping bear expectations, Amy!

I'm assuming some of you occasionally struggle with reality not meeting your expectations.

Life is full of these moments. Expectations – especially those which last for a long time create a buildup and a hope that is often unattainable. Sometimes we think that we are on the verge of a decision or action that is going to make us happier than we've ever been, but the result isn't quite what we had expected. And it feels especially relevant when we think about Palm Sunday.

Let's look back to our scripture passage. The day had come for Jesus to enter Jerusalem. The disciples were told to go and bring a young donkey for Jesus to ride on, I'm sure scratching their heads wondering why he didn't pick a more noble animal for his transportation. A hopeful and expectant crowd had gathered to usher Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. These were folks who were part of a long line of persecuted waiting people, a people living in a place of great significance, yet amid a future not fully realized. Jerusalem, just like today, was a key religious and political city, and during this time it was being occupied and controlled by Rome – the strongest political and military power of the era.

The Jewish tradition of longing for a messiah goes back way before Jesus, though there are many different kinds of visions for what a messiah might look like. People wanted freedom, and they wanted freedom from one of the most powerful regimes of history. Rome was an incredible military power – wouldn't it make sense for this savior to be a military leader? The Israelites were in need of someone who could burst on the scene with power and might to bring about this release. Perhaps some were hoping for a new political dynasty... perhaps the return of a powerful king to rule the people from the city of Jerusalem.

Regardless of what kind of messiah the people were longing for, I would imagine that a common hope or dream was for a leader who would emerge to bring about release from their oppression.

I want to pause here for a second - how many of you would know the name Terry Fox?

Terry Fox was a Canadian athlete, humanitarian, and cancer research activist. In 1980, with one of his legs already having been amputated due to cancer in his body, he set out on a cross-country run across Canada, attempting to raise money and awareness for cancer research. He had some lofty goals - he wanted to raise a dollar for every Canadian - at the time, about 25 million citizens. He wanted to run from Newfoundland in the east, all the way to British Columbia - a route covering approximately 15,000 miles.

He began quietly, with little fanfare. Few people had ever heard of him, and it took a while for local news outlets to begin reporting on his story in the small towns that he passed through. But the longer his journey went on, the more people became aware. Thousands of people took note, some even started running alongside, or cheering him on by trying to help him on his way. Unfortunately, the spread of Terry's cancer eventually reached his lungs, and forced him to end his journey about halfway across - well short of his goal of crossing the country. Cancer wound up taking his life soon after.

As I recounted this story to some friends this week, one person paused and said, "Stop telling us this story Ben... this is a Canadian hero? This story is terrible. Nothing turns out! Everything goes wrong!"

When we hear a story like this, we might hope for a more positive outcome. We imagine the Hollywood version of this story where as the runner runs, the stronger he gets. Cheered on by an entire nation leads to so much positivity that the cancer goes into remission, and the runner reaches the end goal long before he hoped, raising far more money than anyone could have imagined.

But that's not what happened for Terry Fox. We might point out all the ways his expectations went wrong - he didn't complete what he set out to do, or his body wasn't strong enough to overcome cancer, or perhaps that it would have been a better use of his remaining life to spend it with family and friends rather than taking on a seemingly impossible task.

Yet pointing to these outcomes is only part of the story. Terry Fox could never have dreamed about the legacy that he would leave behind.

Terry Fox was the youngest person named to the Order of Canada and won the 1980 Lou Marsh Award as the nation's top sportsman. He was named Canada's Newsmaker of the Year in both 1980 and 1981 by The Canadian Press. When forced to abandon his run, he had raised just shy of 2 million dollars, and while his initial run didn't meet his expectation of a dollar raised for every Canadian, it took less than a year after he initially began for donations to reach more than 20 million.

His story continued to inspire people even after he had abandoned his run. It has been said that at one point he was receiving more daily mail than the rest of the entire home town of about 30,000 people. His funeral in 1981 was broadcast nationally in Canada. His wikipedia page claims that since his passing there have been more than 30 roads and streets named in his honor, as well as 14 schools, and dozens of other municipal and athletic facilities. There are seven known statues depicting him across the country, and at least 14 fitness trails. A mountain in the Canadian Rockies, and a Canadian coast guard ship have also been named in his honor. As Jess McCormick and I can attest, if you grow up attending school in Canada any time after 1980, Terry Fox is named in school textbooks whenever they highlight significant Canadians. In fact, I can still sing a few bars of a song we were taught in elementary school highlighting his legacy.

Since his death in 1981, The annual Terry Fox Runs, and his ongoing foundation have raised more than 200 million dollars for cancer research, far surpassing his expectations.

We may dismiss someone like Terry Fox as an example that is unfathomable or unattainable , but we each take steps every day hoping for the best, but unsure of whether our expectations will be met, sometimes surprised when expectations transform into something even more meaningful.

I'll admit, I'm preaching to myself a little this morning. More than two years ago my friend Mike Ford shared that he had obtained a pastoral sabbatical Lily Grant, and included in this grant was a two week bike trip on the Camino de Santiago in Spain. Significantly for me, he had included the names of myself and another pastor colleague as people to journey with, extending the gift of a free bike trip to Spain for the three of us. In the months since then, a global pandemic broke out, and Mike was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident. This trip, postponed and rescheduled a few times, is now scheduled for next month. Needless to say, it is one that is filled with expectation. What will the pandemic mean for finding lodging along the way? How much of a pilgrimage will it be with the surge of people now returning to global travel after their own pandemic-postponed journeys. How will Mike's still-recovering body hold up to two weeks on a bike?

Where I once held expectations that our journey would unfold in a somewhat predictable way, I now hold it loosely, hoping that we will find meaning regardless of how it all unfolds.

Similar to the Terry Fox story, and my pending bike trip, the Israelites had expectations for a messianic hero with incredible power and might, but what emerged instead was Jesus - completely different than what they expected, but somehow more meaningful and valuable. He began a new kind of movement – a movement that challenged the accepted systems of power and tradition. It was a movement built on love and compassion for the marginalized, and seemed to move forward with incredible momentum despite not fitting the hopes of those in His midst. His was a movement that was bent on turning the tables and ushering in a new kind of kingdom. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, into the regional center of power, NOT as a general on a war horse leading a well-trained army, but on a humble donkey proclaiming peace and leading a band of disciples and followers who are poorly trained and rarely understand what is going on. We know, because we get to read ahead in our scripture passages that Jesus is crucified - clearly not what a messiah was supposed to do - yet even death does not hold him as he miraculously moves beyond the tomb into eternal life.

The Israelites often get criticized for not recognizing this new kind of messiah when he was right under their nose. Jesus' triumphant entry into the city amounts to a parade of fools, who not too many days later were probably part of the mobs chanting, "Crucify him!" It would have taken a special kind of follower to release themselves of their expectations, to place trust in God's plan, and in this Jesus figure.

Palm Sunday is filled with expectation. It also ushers in some discomfort. What is about to come as we move through Holy Week is challenging stuff. We look forward to Easter and the joy in which it brings because we know that our savior is going to win in the end, but the reality is that we are about to experience moments of darkness. This is a time of mixed emotions, twisted realities, and it includes the gruesome death on a cross.

As we move from this place, consider the things which we hold on to with our expectations. Where are those moments in our lives where we hope beyond all hope for our race to finish the way we want, or our clay creations to turn out right, for the our lives to move beyond the pandemic, or for our messiah to act a certain way, only to discover it doesn't meet our expectations? How might we live into the uncertainty, and prepare ourselves for something even more miraculous to occur?

We put our faith in this new kind of king, and we pray for a new kind of kingdom that moves beyond anything we might have hoped for.

Come Lord Jesus.