

Advent 1B, 2008

Text: Mark 11:1-10

Title: High Expectations

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It's fifty-two days away. On January 20, 2009 Barack Obama will be inaugurated as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. By some estimates up to 5 million people will be in Washington DC for the event. There will be parades and parties and all sorts of celebrations.

People have high expectations for our new president. They expect him to fix our current economic crisis- to bring the stock market back up and create jobs so that people don't have to worry about unemployment and losing their investments. People expect him to make improvements to our healthcare system so that everyone can get the medical treatment that they need. People expect him to keep us safe from terrorism and to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. People expect him to improve foreign relations and rebuild America's image around the world.

And we could go on and on. Many people have very high expectations for our next president. And we hope and pray that he does a good job, that he serves our country faithfully and administers our laws with justice.

But chances are that four years from now not all these expectations will be met. There will still be problems with the economy, there will still be problems with crime and poverty and health care and security. Barack Obama is still human, and there will be disappointments and failures in the next four years.

This isn't the only time that people have had high expectations for a new, young leaders. The crowds of Jerusalem had high expectations for a new prophet from the backcountry of Galilee. They had heard rumors and reports that he had unusual powers. He could feed thousands of people with a single lunch (wouldn't that be great for the economy). He could heal people and even raise the dead (how's that for a healthcare plan). He was young, he was a dynamic speaker, and maybe he could be the one.

People had high expectations for Jesus that day when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. In the midst of their hosannas, they cried out, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David." The crowds expected a new David. They wanted Jesus to bring back the glory days of King David.

Under David the enemies of Israel were defeated. Beginning with Goliath, David took care of the Philistines and secured the borders of Israel. He captured Jerusalem and made it his capital city. He moved the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and made plans for the temple. Everything was great with David.

What the people were forgetting was that even David did not live up expectations. He slept with the wife of one of his officers and had him killed. His family was constantly fighting and one of his sons even usurped the throne. Near the end of his life, David relied more on his army than on the Lord, and a plague killed 70,000 Israelites.

Things were not perfect under David. Even under Solomon things were going downhill, and by the time David's grandson sat on the throne, the kingdom had fallen apart.

But David's kingdom was the best the people of Jerusalem expected. They wanted an end to Roman rule. They wanted peace and prosperity, and they thought this Jesus would be the one to deliver.

Imagine, for a moment, if the people of Jerusalem had gotten what they wanted. Imagine if Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem and organized a rebellion against Rome. Imagine if He had been successful and set up a David-like kingdom in Jerusalem. Would everyone be happy? Would he meet their expectations?

Probably not. People would still want more. People would complain and fight amongst themselves. And if it was anything like David's kingdom, it would have problems, and it would be short-lived.

No temporal kingdom or empire or country this side of Eden has been a utopia. Eden was the first and only Paradise on earth. And no matter who we elect, there will still be problems here in America.

As you know, Jesus did not come to set up a kingdom on earth, at least not the kind of kingdom people expected. His was the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the otherworldly kingdom. This kingdom works by gift rather than force, in this kingdom the king serves you. In this kingdom the king hangs dead on the cross, crowned with thorns, and convicted criminals on His right and His left.

This is the kingdom Jesus was coming to bring. He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, not a war-horse. He comes not in a limo, a Cadillac, or humvee, but in a Honda Civic.

For most of the crowd who gather that first Palm Sunday, Jesus did not live up to their expectations. Look what happened in the next few days. Jesus cleared the temple, but He did not confront the Romans. He taught, but He did not call for a revolution. By the end of the week, it was clear that He was not the one they thought they had elected. Their new leader just wasn't working out. He didn't live up to their expectations. And so on the first Black Friday, crowds gathered early in the morning to call for His death. Get rid of Him! Crucify Him!

And they did. They beat Him, mocked Him, and nailed Him to a cross and watched Him die. He just didn't meet their expectations.

Jesus is coming. He will ride not on a donkey, but on a white horse (see Revelation 19). He will ride not over palms and cloaks, but on the clouds of heaven. His coming will not be with the

shouts of the crowds of Jerusalem, but with the songs of thousands of angels from the heavenly chorus. His coming will be a coronation, an inauguration like none the world has ever seen. There will not be millions in attendance, but billions. All people who have ever lived will be there. And when He comes every knee will bow and every tongue proclaim Him Lord.

We are in Advent now, and Advent means, “coming.” There is a threefold coming of Christ. The first is His coming at the incarnation, when He comes as the babe of Bethlehem, the child of Mary, who comes to Jerusalem and is enthroned on His cross. The second is Jesus’ coming to be with us now in Word and Sacrament. The altar is the new manger and He is incarnate in the bread and wine. His throne is your heart and He comes to dwell within you. The third is that final coming, when He comes to judge the world. He will make all things new and reign on His heavenly throne.

So when Jesus comes, what do you expect of Him? What do you expect Him to do for you? What are your expectations for your new king? What do you pray for? How do you expect Jesus to answer your prayers?

Chances are, you don’t expect enough from Jesus.

Do you expect Him to heal your body? To get rid of all the aches and pains? Not only will Jesus grant you healing, He will give you a brand new, recreated body, just like His when He comes in glory. And even now He gives you His own body and blood to eat and to drink- to strengthen you in body and soul.

Do you expect Jesus take care of your finances? To provide for you and your family? Not only will Jesus give you everything you need, He will give you a heavenly inheritance when He comes in His glory. What Jesus has planned for us is more than we could ever conceive, or imagine, or expect from Him.

Do you expect Jesus to bring you peace- to help you get along with your family and neighbors? When Jesus comes in glory He will establish a kingdom of peace, a new Eden, where all nations dwell together in peace and harmony and all His enemies are completely destroyed.

Jesus is coming. We don’t know exactly when the great inauguration will be. But we do know that when Jesus is king, He will exceed all of our expectations for Him.

Until then, He continues to come, but in a hidden way. He still rides donkeys.

And so in a few moments we will sing “Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He, Blessed is He, Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

For Jesus is coming. He rides in on the bread and the wine and makes your heart His throne. When He comes, He will change you. You will not leave this altar the same person you were when you came. You will leave here strengthened, enlivened, refreshed. You will be a changed person- cleansed and made holy by His body and His blood.

What Jesus will accomplish in you and in your life this Advent and in the year to come will be beyond your expectations. Who would think that someone will love and forgive you the way that Jesus will? Who would think that Jesus would use someone like you to do His work. He makes you his donkey, riding you out into the world to show His love and care and compassion to those around you.

Jesus came. Jesus comes. Jesus will come again. Each time exceeding expectations.